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THESIS

**MINDING THE FACTORS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT:
HOW LESSONS FROM PANAMA
COULD PREVENT FUTURE IRAQS**

by

Michael S. Handlan
Michael D. Salazar

June 2017

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Anna Simons
Glenn E. Robinson

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COULD PREVENT FUTURE IRAQS**

Michael S. Handlan
Major, United States Army
B.S., Hampden-Sydney College, 2006

Michael D. Salazar
Major, United States Army
B.S., The Citadel, 2006

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
June 2017**

Approved by: Dr. Anna Simons
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Glenn E. Robinson
Second Reader

Dr. John B. Arquilla
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis poses the question, “Under what conditions can the United States government gain and maintain public support for the use of force?” and contends that public support for the use of force is a byproduct of the interactions among four factors: the articulation of clearly defined political objectives; an appropriate strategy to enable the accomplishment of those political objectives; proper strategic cooperation; and the perceived legitimacy of the conflict. To demonstrate how national-level decision-makers can gain and maintain public support for the use of force, by appropriately addressing these factors, this thesis compares Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty in Panama with Operation Iraqi Freedom. In both instances, the United States sought regime change and many of the key decision-makers were the same. Yet, the United States fared much better in Panama than Iraq. A closer examination of our four factors—policy, strategy, strategic cooperation, and legitimacy—helps explain why.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANSA	Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CFLCC	Combined Forces Land Component Command
CINCSOUTH	Commander in Chief, United States Southern Command
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
COIN	counterinsurgency
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
DOS	Department of State
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HQ	headquarters
JTF-PM	Joint Task Force-Panama
JTFSO	Joint Task Force-South
JTF-SOUTH	Joint Task Force-South
MSG	Military Support Group
NCA	National Command Authority
NSA	National Security Advisor
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OHRA	Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OJC	Operation Just Cause
PDF	Panamanian Defense Force
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SECSTATE	Secretary of State
SOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
SOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command
TF	task force
TFIV	Task Force IV

UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
ZULU	time zone indicator for Universal Time

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Retrospective Panama: How a quagmire there threatens to bog down Bush’s re-election bid,” *Washington Morning Star*

WASHINGTON October 18, 1992. As the election draws nearer, President George H. W. Bush faced more criticism this past week from the Clinton campaign regarding the United States’ ever-growing number of troops in Panama. U.S. forces continue to struggle to regain control over the country in the wake of Washington’s efforts to remove Manuel Noriega from power, a dictator Washington helped install.

Three years ago, Moises Giraldi seemed the ideal answer to the United States’ Noriega problem, especially once U.S. relations with General Noriega had deteriorated. In retaliation for threats to U.S. access to the Panama Canal, the Department of Justice finally decided to indict Noriega on drug trafficking charges. Noriega reacted by instructing the Panamanian Defense Forces to attack and harass U.S. citizens in Panama. In the wake of his instructions, one U.S. Marine was killed, a sailor and his wife were unlawfully detained, and the wife was sexually harassed. As the U.S. prepared to unleash the dogs of war, a unique opportunity seemed to present itself in the form of a coup plotted by Panamanian Major Moises Giraldi.¹ Giraldi appeared to have the backing of key elements of the PDF. He also promised to re-establish democracy once Noriega was removed. Giraldi was already in Panama, unlike the weak-seeming government-in-exile. Consequently, the Bush administration provided air support and a limited number of troops to assist in what it originally thought would be a relatively easy campaign to wrest Panama from Noriega’s grasp.

However, not only did Panamanian forces loyal to Giraldi fail to apprehend Noriega during the coup, but he continued to elude capture. PDF elements loyal to Noriega similarly escaped. From strongholds in the jungle and mountain region, they quickly re-organized and began conducting a highly effective insurgency campaign to undermine the Giraldi government. As conditions worsened and access to the Panama Canal looked increasingly imperiled, U.S. force levels gradually crept higher. Now, after deploying over 100,000 troops and taking over a thousand casualties during a more than two-year period there is still no end in sight. Noriega remains at large and appears to be orchestrating the

¹ Mike Billington, “U.S. Indecision Doomed Panama Coup Try,” *Sun-Sentinel*, October 8, 1989, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1989-10-08/news/8902030200_1_coup-attempt-urraca-battalion-major-moises-giraldi.

insurgency. In response, the Giraldi government has recently cancelled upcoming elections and has begun cracking down on communities where it believes Noriega retains support. Allegations of human rights abuses are growing. Consequently, the Bush administration finds itself in a quandary. Giraldi is seen as Washington's man; the U.S. can't abandon the Panama Canal; and, at the same time, the government-in-exile claims that it is still Panama's rightful government. In light of this, it is a small wonder that Bill Clinton has been able to ask at every campaign stop: "How could we *not* have known what we were doing in Panama?" Or, as a banner in his campaign war room summarizes his efforts to unseat Bush, "It's the strategy, stupid."

Clearly, the news analysis reproduced above is a work of fiction. The United States generally performed well in Panama. Indeed, as this thesis will make clear, Panama was largely a success for the United States. *But, what if it had gone differently?* What if certain decisions and events had shaped operations in Panama differently? Then, the situation might have more closely resembled what has happened in Iraq. However, the fact that Panama did not turn into a quagmire or a "fiasco" along with the fact that so many of the same key people participated in decision-making in both conflicts begs the question: how did the United States get it right in Panama and so wrong in Iraq?²

A. GENESIS

Richard Nixon stated, "When a president sends American troops to war, a hidden timer starts to run. He has a finite period of time to win the war before people grow weary of it."³ We believe that Nixon was partially correct, but that the start button on the timer is governed by factors that affect if or when the American populace actually begins to become weary of war. We believe that these factors include: the articulation of clearly defined political objectives; an appropriate strategy to enable the accomplishment of those political objectives; proper strategic cooperation; and the perceived legitimacy of the conflict. We differ from Nixon in that we do not believe that the simple act of deploying a force starts a clock; we suspect that the four factors explored in this thesis

² Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

³ Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 88.

interact to create a threshold of U.S. domestic public support. When the U.S. population moves from being supportive or complacent to actively withdrawing support from U.S. participation in conflict it has crossed the threshold. Once this is passed, the operation, military leaders, political leaders, and so on, are “on the clock.” A theoretical timer has started and U.S. senior leadership now has three options: 1) win quickly, 2) get out quickly, or 3) get back under the threshold and regain public support.

Extensive literatures already address the significance of legitimacy in nation-state warfare, the need to match strategy to policy, and the importance of relations to strategic cooperation. Our purpose is to add value to this enormous body of knowledge by describing how our four factors interact in today’s environment to impact public support for the use of force. Among the questions we seek to answer is: “If the threshold of U.S. domestic public support for a conflict can be identified, can senior policy makers and military leaders use that knowledge to prevent the United States from crossing that threshold, thus helping them achieve policy objectives without losing public support?” Presumably, monitoring the factors would assist senior leaders in the U.S. national security establishment to be able to make appropriate, ongoing adjustments.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

Under what conditions can the United States government gain and maintain public support for the use of force?

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

To help establish the importance of our four factors, we have divided this literature review into four sections, with each section devoted to a single factor.

1. Policy

To paraphrase Clausewitz, “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means.”⁴ In accordance with this premise, U.S. policy objectives should be clear and

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

must not be contradictory if the United States expects to achieve its objectives through the use of coercive force. While Clausewitz makes clear that war is political in nature, there still exists a gap in what is understood to be a policy objective and how military action, or military strategy, should help achieve that objective. In his article, “Towards A Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model,” Richard Yarger provides some much-needed detail and clarification as to what policy objectives are and how they relate to strategy:

Policy is the expression of the desired end state sought by the government. In its finest form it is clear articulation of guidance for the employment of the instruments of power towards the attainment of one or more end states. In practice it tends to be much vaguer. Nonetheless policy dominates strategy by its articulation of the end state and its guidance. The analysis of the end state and guidance yields objectives leading to the desired end state. Objectives provide purpose, focus, and justification for the actions embodied in a strategy. National strategy is concerned with a hierarchy of objectives that is determined by the political purpose of the state. Policy insures that strategy pursues appropriate aims.⁵

For Americans, Vietnam serves as an unfortunate example of a set of striking contradictions in policy. The United States’ articulated policy objective was to stop the spread of communism and retain a free and independent South Vietnam.⁶ These desires required the elimination of the conventional threat in the north posed by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), as well as removal of the asymmetric threat in the south presented by the Viet Cong. However, the political aims for Vietnam were subordinate to and inappropriately nested within the U.S. Cold War aim of avoiding Chinese intervention and preventing vertical escalation with Russia, which could possibly lead to a nuclear World War III. In essence, this greater Cold War policy served to significantly restrict the military strategy by forbidding any action that could accidentally lead to

⁵ Richard H. Yarger, “Towards A Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model,” in *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, ed. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., 4th ed. (Carlisle Barracks PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 46.

⁶ “Joint Resolution 1145,” 88th Cong. (August 10, 1964).

escalation with America's Cold War foes. Yet, it also ultimately undermined America's policy objective *in* Vietnam.

Not only did the United States' contradictory war aims prevent strategists from appropriately projecting forces into North Vietnam, thereby effectively thwarting any chance of obtaining a political victory in Vietnam, but worse, by not appropriately nesting policy objectives and clearly articulating those objectives to the American public, U.S. political leaders lost public support for the use of coercive force. Again, to borrow from Clausewitz, "No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."⁷

In this age of limited warfare, when total war by a nuclear power is prohibited by social norms, having clear political objectives becomes all the more critical for two reasons. First, to enable strategists to develop war plans that can achieve the stated political goals. Second, without an end state, the war effort is doomed to drag on indefinitely and will inevitably lead to a loss of public support and a degradation of public confidence in both government and military as exhibited during the Vietnam War and more recently, as we will see in the following chapters.

2. Strategy

Equally important is for the U.S. government to explicitly describe what it wants to achieve in policy. Without this, war planners cannot develop a strategy that will meet Washington's intent. In his article, "Politics and the American Way of War (and Strategy)," Frank Hoffman describes some interesting friction points regarding strategy implementation during a conflict. First, he recalls Antulio Echevarria's observation about the paradox between the conceptualization of strategy as an art and the development of strategy as a science. Second, he blames a cultural turn in the U.S. military for its aversion to considering political constraints while developing strategy. He reminds us that, as Sir Lawrence Freedman notes, "one finds among American military thinking that

⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 579.

politics is often treated [by]...military theory as an awkward exogenous factor, at best a necessary inconvenience and at worst a source of weakness and constraint.”⁸ In addition to ignoring political realities, Hoffman explains that the U.S. military sometimes fails in other regards as well, for instance when planners clearly devise a strategy they deem necessary to pursue and then very plainly assign inappropriate forces to accomplish that strategy.

Richard Yarger makes an argument that helps explain these gaps. He begins by acknowledging that within U.S. military culture, there may be no overarching theory of strategy to which those in uniform subscribe. Yarger finds this disappointing since the Army War College’s strategic model (created by Art Lykke) of ends, ways, and means, seems to offer a simple yet effective rubric. According to Yarger, strategy as a theoretical model is simply misunderstood, as it has been rendered unnecessarily complex “as a result of confusion over terminology and definitions and the underlying assumptions and premises.”⁹

Yarger contends that the first failure of U.S. strategy may lie with the words and definitions surrounding the concept itself. In Yarger’s view, the word “strategy” is often used to merely describe a plan or idea with regard to a general path to be taken within a conflict. This loose application of “strategy” in the vernacular undercuts how important it is to conceptualize strategy at the highest levels. Plainly put, strategy offers control, direction, and guidance to war planners as they react to an ever-changing strategic and operational environment. An appropriate strategy offers a safety net that prevents war from becoming a runaway train, or an end in and of itself. As strategy is developed and implemented, its ends, ways, and means must serve to complement, not complicate, one another:

Strategy is all about *how* (way or concept) leadership will use the *power* (means or resources) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve *objectives* (ends) that

⁸ Frank Hoffman, “Politics and the American Way of War (and Strategy),” *War on the Rocks*, October 15, 2013, <http://warontherocks.com/2013/10/politics-and-the-american-way-of-war-and-strategy/>.

⁹ Yarger, “Towards A Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model,” 45.

support state interests. Strategy provides direction for the coercive or persuasive use of this power to achieve specified objectives. This direction is by nature proactive. It seeks to control the environment as opposed to reacting to it. Strategy is not crisis management. It is its antithesis. Crisis management occurs when there is no strategy or the strategy fails.¹⁰

Essentially, if strategists were to be given a clear political objective that decision makers seek to achieve via the use of coercive force, then our nation's leaders would have a far better chance of designing the ways by which to achieve those ends. Or, to again borrow from Yarger, who himself quotes an analogy of Art Lykke's, imagine that strategy starts as a balanced three-legged bar stool. The legs of the stool are comprised of the ends, ways, and means of strategy. If strategists develop ways that fall short, the stool will tilt, ultimately increasing the risk of failure and destabilizing the strategy as a whole.¹¹

Yarger invokes the bar stool strategy to raise three critical questions strategists should always ask: "What is to be done? How is it to be done? What resources are required to do it in this manner?"¹² Here, we would like to suggest that a crucial fourth question is missing: *who should do it?* We are driven to add this question based on the observation that while strategists and commanders have defined our current adversaries as posing an asymmetric, unconventional threat, they have then tasked conventional attrition-focused forces with taking the lead, even though these forces are not trained, organized, or equipped to counter such a threat.

In his article, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," Ivan Arreguín-Toft analyzes why weak actors have begun to best strong actors in armed conflicts. Interestingly, his deductions help to pinpoint gaps in current strategic approaches (ways).

I argue that the universe of potential strategies and counterstrategies can be reduced to two distinct ideal-type strategic approaches: direct and indirect. Direct approaches target an adversary's armed forces in order to

¹⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹¹ Ibid., 48.

¹² Ibid., 49.

destroy that adversary's capacity to fight. Indirect approaches seek to destroy an adversary's will to fight ... Same-approach interactions (direct-direct or indirect-indirect) imply defeat for weak actors because there is nothing to mediate or deflect a strong actor's power advantage. These interactions will therefore be resolved quickly. By contrast, opposite-approach interactions (direct-indirect or indirect-direct) imply victory for weak actors because the strong actor's power advantage is deflected or dodged. These therefore tend to be protracted, with time favoring the weak.¹³

Arreguín-Toft's "opposite-approach strategy" can be observed in Iraq and Afghanistan as U.S. general purpose forces were surged into both countries with the goal of defeating an insurgency via presence patrols, movements-to-contact, micro-loans, the distribution of soccer balls, drone strikes, and chasing around guerrillas that always seemed to just elude capture or even proliferate overnight. This mismatch between forces has a tendency, according to Arreguín-Toft, to drag out conflicts and has historically proven problematic for the United States. Moreover, Arreguín-Toft describes a circular dynamic by which mismatched interactions in asymmetric conflicts can lead to lackluster performance, thereby guaranteeing an unexpected delay in the attainment of military or political objectives. This failure, in turn, then leads to the commitment of additional forces that are still unable to best their asymmetric opponent, further delaying any likely victory, and leading ultimately to domestic pressure for withdrawal from the conflict.¹⁴

3. Strategic Cooperation

In our thesis, we define strategic cooperation as the overt unity of effort at the highest levels within the U.S. government. Strategic cooperation refers to healthy civil-military relations and, perhaps more importantly, healthy interagency collaboration among principals in the executive branch. While strategic cooperation should be considered essential to effectively generate strategy and implement policy, it can prove difficult to execute.

¹³ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

In *The Soldier and The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Samuel Huntington describes civil-military relations as an integral component of national security policy, which has the ultimate aim of advancing “the safety of the nation’s social, economic, and political institutions against threats arising from other independent states.”¹⁵ In Huntington’s view:

Nations which develop a properly balanced pattern of civil-military relations have a great advantage in their search for security. They increase their likelihood of reaching right answers to the operating issues of military policy. Nations which fail to develop a balanced pattern of civil-military relations squander their resources and run uncalculated risks.¹⁶

Imbalances may not simply result from a lack of consideration, or pure incompetence. Rather, they may be the manifestation of an underlying struggle between two forces Huntington believes are faced by all societies. These are the “functional imperatives,” which are derived from perceived threats, and the “social imperatives,” which are derived from the principles and organizations dominating society.¹⁷ Moreover, Huntington teaches us that since the 1940s, technological advances and new forms of international relations have stripped the United States of its enduring sense of assumed national security. Certainly, the public’s perceptions of our security condition have ebbed and flowed since *The Soldier and the State* was published. However, disagreements over the state of our security and what should be done about it endure. Indeed, Huntington frames the two questions we continue to wrestle with: “What pattern of civil-military relations is most compatible with American liberal democratic values? ...[and] What pattern of civil military relations will best maintain the security of the American nation?”¹⁸

As Hy Rothstein describes the tensions inherent in civilian-military relations, “The central issue in civil-military relationships involves a simple paradox: Because people fear others, they create an institution of violence for protection; but then this very

¹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

institution becomes a source of fear.”¹⁹ Within the United States, this fear may not translate into alarm over a possible coup or military takeover. However, it can concern control over the outcome of a war. In a democracy, civilian and military leaders should be in agreement. As Rothstein goes on to explain, “Civilian leaders are responsible for setting the policy goals, providing resources, establishing strategic priorities, and even levying operational constraints.”²⁰ Meanwhile, “Military leaders must insist on clarity regarding the purpose of the military operation, and must object when ... the use of force, the constraints applied, or the resources provided are unlikely to deliver the expressed policy goals.”²¹

We like this description of civil-military relations because it acknowledges an environment wherein the military is indeed beholden to its civilian masters; however, it also describes an environment in which military leaders’ opinions are valued and respected. At the same time, we would also go a step further and suggest that healthy civil-military relations are necessary for obtaining victory, and that the concept of an attainable victory is itself essential for sustaining, retaining, and maintaining public support.

While healthy civil-military relations are vital to strategic cooperation, and thus our ability to achieve success in war, a separate, perhaps more important set of relations has to exist at the highest level of the U.S. government: namely, those among foreign policy, defense, and homeland security principals. The nature of these interpersonal relations can enhance or cripple the United States’ ability to formulate appropriate policy or strategy well before traditional civil-military frictions arise. The principals with the highest levels of influence on U.S. decision-making include the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Treasury, Secretary of Defense, the Assistant to the President for National Security (ANSA), the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and

¹⁹ Leo J. Blanken, Hy S. Rothstein, and Jason J. Lepore, eds., *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 19. Additionally, in the text of this source, the author cites Peter Feaver in citation 12 of Chapter II.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ Ibid., 20.

the Director of National Intelligence.²² When the relationships among these principals become dysfunctional, the United States can expect to see shortcomings in its strategic decision-making. In other words, if, for instance, the vice president or secretary of defense is actively working to weaken the role of the secretary of state or ANSA within the policy-making process, we can expect bureaucratic in-fighting. As Doug Borer notes (*pace* Alexander George), in order to have a:

Balanced and adequate flow of information and advice to the president...First, there must be a roughly equal distribution of intellectual and bureaucratic resources among the major actors in the NSC system. Second, there must be presidential-level monitoring of the process to make sure it was flowing smoothly. Finally, there must be adequate time and opportunity for debate and analysis of options [and] in order for the multiple advocacy system to work, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (ANSA) must manage the process closely.²³

4. Legitimacy

Legitimacy may be the most important of the factors that contribute to determining the threshold of U.S. domestic public support for conflict. Just War theory, as commonly described, encompasses both *jus ad bellum* (going to war justly) and *jus in bello* (right conduct in war), “The *jus ad bellum* lays down the conditions that must be met in order to have permissible recourse to armed coercion.”²⁴

The following criteria frequently appear in comprehensive just-war theories: legitimate or competent authority, just cause, right intention, announcement of intention, last resort, reasonable hope of success, proportionality, and just conduct. All these criteria taken together, with the exception of the last one, establish the *jus ad bellum*, the right to go to

²² “National Security Council,” *The White House*, accessed October 20, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/node/146>. (site modified); Since the Truman era, “the [National Security] Council’s function has been to advise and assist the President on national security and foreign policies. The Council also serves as the President’s principal arm for coordinating these policies among various government agencies.”

²³ Douglas A. Borer and Stephen W. Twing, “Blundering into Baghdad: An Analysis of Strategy, Structure, Principles and Agents,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24, no. 3 (September 2011): 500.

²⁴ William Vincent O’Brien, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1981), 16.

war, while the last criterion focuses on the *jus in bello*, right conduct within war.²⁵

Meeting these conditions can be challenging and still generates debate, but policy-makers in democratic institutions are expected to consider them prior to committing troops to combat.

For the most part, meeting the *jus ad bellum* criterion was considered sufficient until the twentieth century. Then, with the advent of large, international alliances and international law as the result of two world wars, along with the advent of nuclear weapons that could destroy humanity, the United States found itself subjected to heightened scrutiny as the world's superpower. According to Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson in "The Sources of American Legitimacy," the four pillars of American legitimacy are that: the United States "pledges the use of U.S. power to [uphold] international law;" United States legitimacy and power are "enhanced by Washington's commitment to consensual modes of decision-making;" the United States must preserve its reputation "for moderation in policy;" and America must succeed "in preserving peace and prosperity within the community of advanced industrial democracies."²⁶ But, even these, along with constraints accepted as part of Just War theory, do not fully reflect today's realities given the now-pervasive influence of the media and the requirement for enduring public support for military action. Indeed, as Tucker and Hendrickson themselves note, "Ultimately ... legitimacy is rooted in opinion."²⁷

When it comes to the use of coercive force, the relationship between legitimacy and public support is perhaps the most important, most complex, and most difficult to have to try to predict or influence. This difficulty stems from two sources. First, modern news media, both domestic and international, have the ability to influence public opinion

²⁵ James F. Childress, "Just-War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities, and Functions of their Criteria," *Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 1978): 428, doi: 10.1177/004056397803900302.

²⁶ Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, "The Sources of American Legitimacy," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 6 (December 2004): 18-32. doi: 10.2307/20034134.

²⁷ Ibid.

to a greater extent than at any point in history. Their influence can deflate public support for an operation which otherwise meets all of the criteria described by both *jus ad bellum* and Tucker and Hendrickson. Conversely, their influence can drastically pump up support for an operation that does not otherwise pass all of the criteria discussed above.

Second, as the criteria for determining legitimacy have evolved over the course of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, so has the American public's ability to express either its support of, or objections to military action. Both can occur simultaneously as we see with polarization over the use of force. However, if, on the whole, the U.S. population seems supportive of action, the government's task of obtaining and maintaining public support can seem achievable. Generally, in this thesis we argue that to *obtain* legitimacy for the use of force one must meet the criterion outlined in *jus ad bellum* through the articulation of clear and well-defined policy objectives. Then, to maintain legitimacy, an appropriate strategy must be implemented to satisfy the criterion of *jus in bello*. Maintaining anything over the long term, of course, presents significant challenges. General Fred Weyand, who served as the U.S. Army Chief of Staff (1974-1976), puts it well: "When the Army is committed the American people are committed, when the American people lose their commitment it is futile to try and keep the Army committed ... the Army is not so much an arm of the Executive Branch as it is an arm of the American people."²⁸

While we would greatly agree with General Weyand that the Army can be representative of the American people, the population's ability to "check" both the government and the military has changed significantly since his day.²⁹ After all, the army General Weyand was speaking of was largely a draft army. Since Vietnam, the United States has chosen to instead maintain a professional, all-volunteer standing army. In the era of an "All-Volunteer Force" and "Professional Army," the question now becomes,

²⁸ Harry G Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 1995), 11.

²⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

how can the American public serve as a viable counter-balance to the government when people can no longer vote with their feet and protest the draft?

D. METHODS AND ROADMAP

To illustrate how our four factors interact, we will examine Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty (Chapter II) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Chapter III). In doing so, we will examine the role of each factor. Then, in Chapter IV, we will compare similarities between the lead-up to Panama and the lead-up to Iraq, the similarities among the policy options available, and the overlap among strategic decision-makers involved in both cases. We will consider why, despite the similarities between the strategic aims, the United States fared so much better in Panama than in Iraq. Ultimately, this will return us to our three assertions:

Assertion 1: We differ from Nixon in that we do not believe that the simple act of deploying a force starts a clock; we suspect that the four factors explored in this thesis interact to create a threshold of U.S. domestic public support.

Assertion 2: When the U.S. population moves from being supportive or complacent to actively withdrawing support from U.S. participation in conflict it has crossed the threshold.

Assertion 3: Once this threshold is passed, the operation, military leaders, political leaders, and so on, are “on the clock.” A theoretical timer has started and U.S. senior leadership now has three options: 1) win quickly, 2) get out quickly, or 3) get back under the threshold and regain public support.

II. OPERATIONS JUST CAUSE AND PROMOTE LIBERTY

A. INTRODUCTION

Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty in Panama are generally viewed as successful U.S. endeavors to execute regime change. Yes, there were some hiccups and some public outcry at home, but overall, and especially in light of Iraq and Afghanistan post-2001, most would likely agree that U.S. efforts in Panama in the late 1980s and early 1990s were a success. Yet, ever since the commencement of operations in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), or some might say since the first Gulf War, Panama is often overlooked as a meaningful case study. Critics might contend that the United States *should* have won—it was a global superpower at the time, pitted against a small, relatively weak military. Or, as one Marine once said, “A superpower whipped the poop out of 10 percent of the police force of a Third World nation. You are supposed to be able to do that. It was done well, and I credit those who did it. But it is important that we draw the right lessons from it.”³⁰

However, no matter how easy it might appear in retrospect, in actuality Panama could have gone quite differently. If not for a few key decisions and interactions, it might have ended up more like Iraq.

We realize this is a bold claim. But, by evaluating U.S. efforts leading up to and during Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty through the lenses of each of our four factors—policy, strategy, strategic cooperation and legitimacy—we hope to make clear that decisions taken at the time enabled the United States to both achieve its political goals through the use of force *and* maintain public support for its operations.

B. POLICY

As discussed in the previous chapter, the purpose of policy objectives is to describe what the government wants to achieve. When it comes to the use of force, the

³⁰ Jennifer M. Taw, *Operation Just Cause: Lessons for Operations Other than War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996), vii.

American public should understand why the government is committing the military to a conflict, what it is going to achieve, and when it will be finished in terms of either time or conditions. To be most effective, policy objectives must be clear, must be reasonably achievable, and must not contradict other objectives or national aims. U.S. policy objectives for Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty largely met these criteria.

At 1:40 AM on December 20, 1989, less than one hour after the commencement of combat operations in Panama, Mr. Marlin Fitzwater, the White House Press Secretary, announced that the invasion of Panama was underway and outlined the four U.S. policy objectives for the operation: 1) protect American lives; 2) restore the democratic process; 3) preserve the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties; and 4) apprehend Manuel Noriega.³¹ Three of these met the criteria described above for well-articulated policy objectives; however, restoring the democratic process would prove to be a little more ambiguous.

The policy objectives of protecting American lives, preserving the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties, and apprehending Manuel Noriega were clear, were achievable, and in no way contradicted any other U.S. policy. More importantly, the average American could look at these objectives and reasonably ascertain the conditions that would have to be met for these tasks to be considered complete. For example, was the Panamanian government now friendly to the United States? Was it still harassing our military? Had the people who were hostile toward the United States been removed from power? Did the U.S. have unfettered access to the Panama Canal? Was Manuel Noriega in United States or Panamanian custody? If the answers to these questions were “yes,” then the United States had likely accomplished what it set out to do in regard to its first three stated policy objectives.

Success regarding the remaining policy objective, to restore the democratic process in Panama, was bound to be more difficult to judge. This objective was very

³¹ “Announcement of U.S. Invasion of Panama.” CSPAN video. 15:00, from the White House Press Secretary’s announcement of the U.S. invasion of Panama on December 20, 1989. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?10386-1/announcement-us-invasion-panama>.

much in line with traditional U.S. foreign policy guidelines—to support democracies worldwide.³² The problem lies with the end state of this objective. How would the United States know when it had restored the democratic process? Would this be achieved when Noriega was captured and the democratically-elected leader, President Endara, was in the capital? Or would it only be evident after another round of elections, or after the United States was sure that the influence and corruption associated with Noriega had been eliminated from the government?

All of these are very subjective questions, which would have made it difficult for either the U.S. public or U.S. elected officials to determine when this fourth policy objective had been accomplished. They also beg the most overarching question: how much democracy did the president want—though perhaps a more appropriate objective might have been to consider democratic legitimacy from the Panamanian perspective. Democratic legitimacy is described as “The degree of popular support for the government. The perception that corruption within the government has been limited to an acceptable level. The perception of the government’s ability to govern. The existence of alternatives to political violence.”³³

C. STRATEGY

The intent here is not to analyze the invasion of Panama at the tactical level, but rather to address the direction of the strategy and choices made during Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty. Thus, many details about skirmishes and fighting will be omitted. Fortunately, at the highest level, leaders and staff within the Department of Defense understood that the objectives to be achieved in Panama required more than just the employment of fire and maneuver, but would require the use of forces from across the

³² “Democracy,” www.state.gov, N.D. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/democ/>.

³³ John T. Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama* (Carlisle Barracks PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1992), 56, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA251124>.

full spectrum of operations.³⁴ Moreover, the specific nature of the policy aims given to the military facilitated the construction of a strategy to achieve our nation's ends. This understanding led the CJCS to provide guidance regarding how (the ways) the intervention in Panama would be executed. The operation would be divided into three phases, with almost the entirety of combat operations occurring during Operation Just Cause. Stability operations would be carried out during both Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty. The concept of the strategy was as follows:

Phase 1: Combat operations at the onset were designed to neutralize and fix in place the PDF [Panamanian Defense Forces], capture Noriega, install a new government, and protect and defend U.S. citizens and key facilities. Phase 2: Stability operations to ensure law and order and begin the transition to support a newly installed government. Phase 3: Nation-building that supported the new Endara government to include restructuring and training the new government.³⁵

Just prior to the launch of assault forces into Panama, the legally elected president of Panama, President Endara, and his two vice presidents joined General Thurman (CINCSOUTH) and Mr. John Bushnell (Deputy Chief of Mission Panama) at the SOUTHCOM Headquarters, in Panama City, to be sworn in by a Panamanian judge. By assuming their offices they would be able to oversee efforts to reconstitute the government of Panama.³⁶ Then, on December 20, 1989, Operation Just Cause began. Not surprisingly, the invasion of Panama was wildly successful as the military force the United States could bring to bear overwhelmed the mostly conventional attempt made by the Noriega regime to stop its advance. By 1800 on D-day, one of the U.S. conventional task forces, TF Bayonet, had complete control of the PDF HQ compound, known as the *Comandancia*. The loss of this compound destroyed the PDF's ability to conventionally

³⁴ Specific leaders within the Department of Defense (DOD) included the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), the Commander in Chief of Southern Command (CINCSOUTH), and the Commander of Joint Task Force - South (JTFSO).

³⁵ E. M. Flanagan, *Battle for Panama: Inside Operation Just Cause* (Washington: Brassey's (US), Inc, 1993), 40.

³⁶ Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988 - January 1990* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995), 35.; President Guillermo Endara had been elected by the people of Panama in May of 1989; however, General Noriega nullified the results of the election and remained in power by force.

command and control resistance throughout Panama, and within a few days the PDF would be rendered irrelevant as an opposition force.³⁷

A few weeks later, on January 3, Noriega was captured and placed under custody of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and flown to Homestead Air Force Base, Florida. In short, the invasion illustrated the United States' ability to expertly utilize

the element of surprise, under the cover of darkness, by using overwhelming force, and by multiple simultaneous strikes that dominated the land, air, and sea. An overwhelming U.S. presence during the combat phase of operations translated into security through strength. The use of military force also served as leverage against opposition during follow-on stability operations.³⁸

Constraints placed on the nature of the invasion also reveal an understanding that the strategy would have to shift from overt fighting to stability operations, where the legitimacy of the new Panamanian government would be tested and on display. These constraints were designed to “limit collateral damage,” to include infrastructure, and to “minimize casualties on both sides.”³⁹ This decision to tread carefully would greatly assist the re-integration of former PDF members into the reconstituted security apparatus.

On January 20, 1990, Operation Just Cause officially ended, with the re-deployment of combat troops under the temporarily formed Joint Task Force-South (JTF-SO) (created specifically for combat operations and dissolved upon its successful execution), leaving the newly formed Military Support Group (MSG) under the command of the Joint Task Force-Panama (JTF-PM) as the DOD entity responsible for overseeing the execution of Phases 2 and 3, specifically, stability operations and nation building.⁴⁰ The MSG was the result of a coordinated effort by U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), SOUTHCOM and JTF-SOUTH to overcome perceived

³⁷ Ibid., 41.

³⁸ William J. Conley Jr., “Operations ‘Just Cause’ and ‘Promote Liberty’: The Implications of Military Operations Other Than War” (master’s thesis, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2001), 29.

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

failures experienced during the first month after the invasion and to reinstate the legitimate government of Panama.

The official mission statement of the MSG was to “Conduct nation building operations to ensure democracy, internationally recognized standards of justice, and professional public services are established and institutionalized in Panama.”⁴¹ Although not perfect, when it was disbanded just over a year after the invasion, the MSG was said to have “left behind a relatively stable country with a functioning government.”⁴² The MSG coordinated closely with the U.S. Embassy and Government of Panama and had

established and trained a police force and turned the training mission over to the Department of Justice ... took charge of the military exercise programme which, in cooperation with other U.S. agencies and the Panamanian government, carried engineering and medical services to many parts of rural Panama ... Finally, the MSG drafted, in coordination with the U.S. Embassy, a country strategy for all U.S. government agencies with respect to Panama.⁴³

In hindsight, perhaps the single most beneficial decision made by the Panamanian government on the advice of the MSG was to develop a new police force, into which former PDF members were (re)integrated. We believe this decision prevented 13,000 former PDF members from merging grievance with opportunity to destabilize the country, which would have de-legitimized the government of Panama, and required a more enduring and overt U.S. security presence in the region.⁴⁴

We do not mean to suggest that all aspects of Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty were executed perfectly; many mistakes were made, ranging from inappropriate compartmentalization at the onset of planning between DOD and civilian agencies

⁴¹ John T. Fishel, “The Murky World of Conflict Termination: Planning and Executing the 1989–90 Restoration of Panama,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 3, no. 1 (March 1992): 65, doi:10.1080/09592319208423011.

⁴² Lawrence Yates, “Panama, 1988–1999: The Disconnect between Combat and Stability Operations,” *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (June 2005): 51.

⁴³ Fishel, “The Murky World of Conflict Termination,” 66.

⁴⁴ Conley, “Operations ‘Just Cause’ and ‘Promote Liberty’: The Implications of Military Operations Other Than War,” 32.

(which added to a lack of preparedness by DOS/DOJ),⁴⁵ to incorrect assumptions regarding the speed with which the Panamanian government would be capable of assuming full control.⁴⁶ Also, what democracy and nation building meant vis a vis U.S. strategy was never tightly defined.⁴⁷ But, worth emphasizing is that failures were primarily limited to the tactical and operational realm, resulting in what seemed at times to be small-scale panic, considerable numbers of refugees, and limited looting. Yet, overall, the strategic direction adopted at the outset, and the military's ability to adjust to failures along the way, allowed for the correction of these problems and ultimately yielded a strategy capable of achieving the political aims sought by the National Command Authority (NCA).⁴⁸ Moreover, although there were outbreaks of disorder, there was no organized enemy operating asymmetrically to take advantage of the operational environment. Rather, the United States' nested strategic thinking, to include decisions to reconstitute the fairly elected government, to re-integrate the PDF into the security apparatus, to preserve infrastructure, and to pursue its goals via civil-military operations, were largely responsible for preventing potential enemy factions from finding traction. All of these decisions also assisted the Panamanian government to move in a direction that supported U.S. initiatives.

D. STRATEGIC COOPERATION

As described earlier, in democracies, there must be agreement among a nation's civilian and military leaders in order to achieve the ends envisioned for going to war in the first place. This relationship does not simply imply military obedience to the state, but rather depends on a healthy interaction among principle policy makers along with military planners, and ongoing exchanges between those establishing our political objectives and those charged with executing them through the use of force. Upon analysis, the evidence suggests that while there were compartmentalization and

⁴⁵ Taw, *Operation Just Cause*, 26.

⁴⁶ Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁸ Yates, "Panama, 1988–1999: The Disconnect between Combat and Stability Operations," 50–51.

coordination failures initially between DOD and civilian agencies regarding Panama, there was an absence of overt infighting.

When President Bush replaced Ronald Reagan on January 20, 1989, he was initially content to maintain Reagan's force buildup plan designed to bring to an end to the slowly developing crisis in Panama. Principal advisors serving under Reagan supported the idea of a U.S. force buildup in Panama, which would either pressure Noriega into stepping down or even possibly incentivize PDF leaders under Noriega to remove him through force.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Reagan's advisors also believed a U.S. invasion that failed to immediately capture Noriega might lead to his escape to the mountains where he would be able to create a guerrilla force.⁵⁰ However, Noriega's nullification of the May 1989 elections results and the violence he sanctioned against his politically victorious opponents served as a catalyst to move President Bush away from the force buildup policy, and toward one of surprise intervention.⁵¹ This shift in policy led to the removal of General Woerner, who was a chief critic of a surprise military invasion, and his replacement by General Thurman as CINCSOUTH. For those serving in the Pentagon, "Thurman's assignment signaled a shift in SOUTHCOM's focus from security assistance to diplomacy toward greater combat readiness."⁵²

At the same time that President Bush began to tilt toward the potential use of military force, he made a number of other personnel changes. For instance, the newly appointed CJCS would play a critical role, and the Joint History Office notes that:

As Chairman, Powell would benefit from longstanding personal relationships with political leaders in both the Reagan and Bush administrations. Under Reagan, Powell, as National Security Adviser, had worked closely on Panamanian issues with Vice President Bush. As Commander in Chief, Forces Command, during the Bush presidency,

⁴⁹ President Reagan's principle advisors included Frank Carlucci as SECDEF; Admiral Crowe as CJCS; and General Woerner as CINCSOUTH.

⁵⁰ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988 - January 1990*, 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 12.

⁵² Ibid., 13.

Powell had worked on aspects of the burgeoning political crisis in Panama.⁵³

Interestingly, General Powell was the “most junior of the fifteen four-stars legally eligible for the chairmanship” when he was nominated by Secretary Cheney and supported by President Bush.⁵⁴ This likely demonstrated the confidence that President Bush and his administration had in Powell’s ability to see their vision through. Within days of Powell’s confirmation, he was asked to offer recommendations regarding a U.S. course of action in response to the October 3, 1989, coup attempt by one of Noriega’s PDF officers. Powell recommended that while support to the coup might facilitate Noriega’s loss of power, it was not likely to relieve the underlying conditions that enabled Noriega to rule. Nor would it achieve Bush’s political aims of restoring democracy in Panama. Perhaps even more important than Powell’s recommendation was concurrence by Secretary Cheney, General Thurman, and *all* of the president’s top advisors.⁵⁵

At the conclusion of the October 3 crisis, Powell reflected on his lessons learned:

Cheney was cool and solid; the Joint Staff was a fast-moving, professional organization; and President Bush, while tolerating the noisy swirl of advisors around him, saw through the essence of issues and made sound decisions.⁵⁶

Given Powell’s prior experience as the national security advisor, his understanding of both the Reagan and Bush administration’s policy aims for Panama, his dedication to the tenet that there needed to be a political aim in any conflict, and his intimate understanding of the strategic environment in Panama, he proved able to give sound military advice to the SECDEF and president without overstepping the boundaries of his roles and responsibilities.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁴ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 408.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 418.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 419.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 434.

The Bush administration's ability to forge strategic cooperation between civilian leaders responsible for establishing policy and those responsible for executing Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty not only greatly enhanced the United States' probability of success, but such cooperation prevented either government or security force vacuums; these were not an option for the Bush administration or its CJCS. Again, we do not want to suggest that cooperation or unity of effort was perfect during the lead up to and execution of Just Cause and Promote Liberty. Interagency collaboration did suffer in the beginning as a direct result of DOD compartmentalization regarding operational security concerns. However, at the time of the invasion, from the NCA level down to the Commander of JTF-Panama, there appeared to be a shared understanding regarding the threat that the Noriega regime posed to U.S. interests, and the conviction that simply removing Noriega without setting the conditions for future success would lead to the void being filled by a Noriega clone.⁵⁸

E. LEGITIMACY

The Bush administration clearly recognized the significance of replacing Noriega's regime with one that Panamanians would consider legitimate. When it comes to legitimacy there are generally three critical audiences: the indigenous population of the target country, the international community at large, and the U.S. domestic population. Each of these audiences must be addressed to gain and maintain legitimacy for the use of force. However, to gain legitimacy and to maintain legitimacy are two separate tasks. In many respects, this is analogous to making the case for *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

1. Jus ad Bellum

Typically, the three driving factors that establish *jus ad bellum* for the United States are U.S. policy, international law and treaties to which the United States is a signatory, and the events that occurred leading up to the conflict. Below, we will examine

⁵⁸ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988-January 1990*, 29.

how these factors contributed to satisfying the requirements prescribed by *jus ad bellum* for the incursion into Panama.

In making a case for the use of force, U.S. Secretary of State Jim Baker stated in an interview on December 21, 1989, that “The United States, under international law, has an inherent right of self-defense, as recognized in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and Article 21 of the O.A.S. Charter, which entitles us to take measures necessary to defend our military personnel, our United States nationals and U.S. installations.”⁵⁹ The responsibility to meet the requirement for a legitimate or competent authority to declare war and approve military intervention rested with the president and Congress. As for a legitimate authority to direct the operation, approval came from the President of the United States and the legal justification was in accordance with the United Nations (UN) Charter and Organization of American States (OAS) charter.

Developing an argument that a war is being undertaken for a “just cause” is the most important, and often the most difficult, requirement to satisfy. Often, this argument is made by describing the actions and counteractions of each belligerent as they draw closer to armed conflict. This “road to war” approach usually culminates with listing the policy objectives, or intentions, that going to war will achieve. On the morning of December 20, 1989, President Bush succinctly and effectively made his just cause case by describing the road to war and the policy objectives he sought:

At 0700, President Bush spoke to the nation:

Fellow citizens, last night I ordered U.S. military forces to Panama....For nearly two years the United States, nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have worked together to resolve the crisis in Panama. The goals of the United States have been to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty. Many attempts have been made

⁵⁹ “Fighting in Panama: The State Dept.; Excerpts from Statement by Baker on U.S. Policy,” *New York Times*, December 21, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/21/world/fighting-in-panama-the-state-dept-excerpts-from-statement-by-baker-on-us-policy.html>.; United Nations, “United Nations Charter, Chapter VII,” June 26, 1945, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html>.; Organization of American States, “Chapter IV, Fundamental Rights and Duties of States,” *OAS Charter*, Washington, DC: OAS. December 5, 1985, http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter_american_treaties_A-41_charter_OAS.asp#Chapter_IV.

to resolve the crisis through diplomacy and negotiations. All were rejected by the dictator of Panama, General Manuel A. Noriega, an indicted drug trafficker. Last Friday Noriega declared his military dictatorship to be in a state of war with the United States and publicly threatened the lives of Americans in Panama. The very next day forces under his command shot and killed an unarmed American serviceman, wounded another, arrested and brutally beat a third American serviceman and then brutally interrogated his wife, threatening her with sexual abuse. That was enough.

General Noriega's reckless threats and attacks upon Americans created an imminent danger to the thirty-five thousand American citizens in Panama. As President I have no higher obligation than to safeguard the lives of American citizens. And that is why I directed our armed forces to protect the lives of Americans citizens in Panama and to bring General Noriega to justice in the United States....

I took this action only after reaching the conclusion that every other avenue was closed and the lives of American citizens were in grave danger...⁶⁰

Of the four policy objectives listed above, protecting America's access to the Panama Canal clearly represented a vital interest. Access to the canal is the chief reason why the United States had a presence in Panama to begin with. Without access to the canal, U.S. national security and economic interests would be severely undermined. Protecting American lives, spreading democracy, and combatting drugs were undoubtedly important. However, none of these objectives on their own would meet the requirements to justify going to war. Those three objectives as supporting arguments behind the main objective—to protect America's vital interest regarding access to the Panama Canal—satisfied the requirement for a just cause in going to war.

The next two requirements, right intention and the announcement of that right intention, are equivalent to having a policy for the use of force and publically stating that policy, as witnessed in President Bush's address to the nation and international community. These two steps may seem simple, but, in a democracy, they are the linchpin to gaining public support for the use of force.

⁶⁰ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988 - January 1990*, 42–43.

The requirement of justifying war as the *ultima ratio*, or the last resort, can be considered problematic because it would seem to some that the only way to meet the last resort criterion would be to act in self-defense. This would restrict a state from being the first to use force, thereby relegating it to only accept going to war after first being attacked. However, according to Childress, “The requirement that war be the last resort does not mean that all possible measures have to be attempted and exhausted if there is no reasonable expectation that they will be successful.”⁶¹ The United States had reached this point with Noriega in Panama. The United States had exhausted the use of economic sanctions after Noriega nullified legitimate election results and it had indicted Noriega on drug charges on February 4, 1988.⁶² Furthermore, Noriega’s PDF had harassed and killed U.S. service members in Panama. Lastly, Noriega had declared war on the United States.⁶³ At this point, the United States had reasonably exhausted all options short of war, thus meeting the criterion of last resort.

2. Jus in Bello

If policy is the driving force behind establishing legitimacy for going to war (*jus ad bellum*), then strategy is the key to maintaining legitimacy throughout the conduct of war (*jus in bello*).

Legitimacy regarding U.S. intentions to restore democracy in Panama was significantly bolstered when the United States facilitated the return and establishment of the legitimately elected Endara government just prior to beginning combat operations.⁶⁴ The fact that Noriega had nullified the results of Endara’s electoral victory provided the United States with a unique opportunity to remove a harsh dictator, execute regime change, and put in place someone who the population truly believed was legitimate.

⁶¹ Childress, “Just-War Theories,” 436.

⁶² Powell and Persico, *My American Journey*, 386–387.

⁶³ Conley, “Operations ‘Just Cause’ and ‘Promote Liberty’: The Implications of Military Operations Other Than War,” 3–9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

Sometimes, what a country declines to do says as much about it as what it actually does. The United States made a thoughtful decision to not support one of the coup attempts because those attempts did not support the restoration of the legitimate and democratically elected Panamanian government. The Reagan and Bush administrations quietly assessed several potential coup leaders and recognized that they could end up simply replacing one dictator with another. President Bush's stance was that any prospective future leader of Panama seeking U.S. support must "express a clear intention to restore democracy 'or we don't commit.'"⁶⁵ While the administration caught some political flak for not supporting these uprisings, its inaction likely enhanced the legitimacy of its assistance to Endara later on. Also, when the United States did finally decide to act, the U.S. public was more than ready to support the President's decision.

The Panama operations provide a great example of how a country like the United States can utilize its forces and a strategy to quickly overwhelm and dominate an enemy while still adhering to the principle of proportionality prescribed by *jus in bello*, thus enhancing its argument for legitimacy. General Colin Powell, as the CJCS during Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty, reflected on the experience: "The lessons I absorbed from Panama confirmed all of my convictions over the preceding twenty years, since the days of doubt over Vietnam. Have a clear political objective and stick to it. Use all of the force necessary, and do not apologize for going in big if that is what it takes. Decisive force ends wars quickly and in the long run saves lives."⁶⁶ The U.S. went in to Panama with a relatively large amount of troops considering the size of the country; however, restrictions such as "(1) limit collateral damage and (2) minimize casualties on both sides" demonstrated the administration's commitment to executing a just, limited war, while winning quickly.⁶⁷ Restrictions such as these helped to ensure that the United States maintained legitimacy in the eyes of both the Panamanian and U.S. domestic populations.

⁶⁵ Powell and Persico, *My American Journey*, 419.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁶⁷ Conley, "Operations 'Just Cause' and 'Promote Liberty': The Implications of Military Operations Other Than War," 13.

Building and maintaining public support for the use of force is no small feat. Demonstrating the legitimacy of the cause, with sound political objectives and strategy supporting it, might check all of the appropriate boxes, but still fall short of motivating the population. Sometimes the public needs to put a face on the enemy.

[A] President has to rally the country behind his policies. And when that policy is war, it is tough to arouse public opinion against political abstractions. A flesh-and-blood villain serves better. And Noriega was rich villain material.⁶⁸

F. CONCLUSION

Although there were points of friction in U.S. operations in Panama throughout the planning and execution phases, the United States was able to achieve its strategic objectives. One proof of this is that the government of Panama is to this day friendly to the United States. In the wake of Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty, U.S. citizens within Panama were protected; Noriega was brought to justice; the PDF was dismantled and re-built; and perhaps, most importantly, the United States continues to enjoy complete freedom of movement through the Panama Canal, whose strategic utility remains vital.

In the end, public support was achieved for U.S. operations in Panama by the president first establishing and articulating clear and largely definable political objectives. These clear objectives enabled the creation and implementation of a fitting and adaptive strategy to accomplish the political objectives, thereby ensuring that legitimacy was bolstered throughout the operation. One portion of that equation did prove a little weak, namely the ambiguity of restoring democracy in Panama. However, proper strategic cooperation enabled U.S. leaders to effectively work together in order to still realize U.S. national interests without losing public support. As for the lessons to be drawn from this case, we could not put it better than the following:

But amid the successful outcome of Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty, one nagging question remained: Would a disconnect between combat and stability operations in a future conflict lead to greater chaos

⁶⁸ Powell and Persico, *My American Journey*, 428.

over a longer period and with less satisfactory outcomes? The U.S. military and the political community that oversees it need to seriously contemplate the answer to that question.⁶⁹

When glancing back at Panama from Iraq, it seems that the concern raised in this passage was generally predictive of what was to come.

⁶⁹ Yates, “Panama, 1988–1999: The Disconnect between Combat and Stability Operations,” 52.

III. OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

A. INTRODUCTION

The reason for our success is that in every instance we have carefully matched the use of military force to our political objectives. President [George H. W.] Bush, more than any other recent President, understands the proper use of military force. In every instance, he has made sure that the objective was clear and that we knew what we were getting into. We owe it to the men and women who go in harm's way to make sure that their lives are not squandered for unclear purposes.⁷⁰

—GEN Colin L. Powell, Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992

If, as Colin Powell suggests, Operations Just and Cause and Promote Liberty proved the importance of properly integrating policy and strategy prior to the use of force then Operation Iraqi Freedom offers a stark contrast of a prolonged engagement during which the United States Government failed to properly manage the factors necessary for maintaining domestic public support. Thanks to the lack of clearly defined political objectives, a flawed strategy, an inability to cooperate at the highest levels of government, and the loss of perceived legitimacy all the way around, the United States did not just *not* succeed, but ended up irretrievably entangled, in sharp contrast to its success in Panama.

B. POLICY

“On March 22, 2003, President George W. Bush told the United States that ‘Our mission is clear, to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam’s support of terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people.’”⁷¹ Unfortunately, these objectives were not as clear, well-defined, or achievable as the President implied. For, if they were, the United

⁷⁰ Colin L. Powell, “Why Generals Get Nervous,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/08/opinion/why-generals-get-nervous.html>.

⁷¹ Jane K. Cramer and A. Trevor Thrall, eds. *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

States and coalition forces should have left Iraq when “on 14 December 2003, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer announced the capture of Saddam to Iraq and the world.”⁷² After all, once Saddam was captured, the United States had effectively both ended Saddam’s support of terrorism (if that ever existed) *and* freed the Iraqi people. Additionally, in the ten months between the initiation of combat operations and the capture of Saddam, it became clear that Saddam did not possess the kind of WMD that the United States feared he had—nuclear weapons—which should have satisfied the remaining policy objective. All of which begs the question: why, if these were the only objectives, did the United States stay?

While contentious in hindsight, Bush’s first two objectives provided the most compelling rationale for going to war at the time. Today, most people believe that Saddam did not possess WMD, nor did he significantly support terrorists in the manner that was described. It was Bush’s third objective—that of freeing the Iraqi people—that kept the United States in Iraq.

For citizens of a democracy, the idea of “freeing” another society sounds noble. Unfortunately, however, without a security and government apparatus to put in place after “liberating” Iraq, the United States was doomed to attempt to fill that role itself. Secretary Powell cautioned against this when he invoked “the Pottery Barn rule: you break it, you own it.”⁷³ To be clear, owning meant restoring or nation-building. Yet, “Nations cannot be built. Most especially they cannot be built by well-meaning but culturally arrogant foreign social scientists, no matter how well intentioned and methodologically sophisticated.”⁷⁴

⁷² Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003-January 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 230.

⁷³ Walter LaFeber, “The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 87, doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25655610>.

LaFeber cited this from Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 149–150.

⁷⁴ Colin S. Gray, “Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory,” *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 3, no. 3 (June 2012): 29.

One reason the United States was successful in Panama was because it was re-instating a legitimately elected government—not creating a democracy overnight. In Iraq, the follow-on objective of creating a representative government once the Iraqi people were free was neither clearly articulated to the American or Iraqi people, nor was it well defined or achievable. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the United States’ involvement in Iraq became increasingly problematic: “Lacking precise political goals, military operations will drift, lose focus and more importantly, lose the public’s support.”⁷⁵

C. STRATEGY

On March 20, 2003, just a few days after President Bush issued his ultimatum demanding that “Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours,” the ground war in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) began, led by CENTCOM Commander General Tommy Franks.⁷⁶ The strategy that Secretary Rumsfeld and President Bush approved consisted of four phases. The phases with their pre-approved endstates were as follows:

1. Phase I: Preparation included “establishing an ‘air bridge’ to transport forces into the region and securing ‘regional and international support for operations.’”⁷⁷
2. Phase II: Shaping the Battlespace “[to] target Iraq’s suspected WMD sites, Republican Guards formations, and command and control facilities, and prevent their use of Theater Ballistic Missiles.”⁷⁸
3. Phase III: Decisive Operations included “‘regime forces defeated or capitulated,’ and ‘regime leaders dead, apprehended, or marginalized.’”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Lawrence P. Farrell Jr, “Before War Strategy Is Settled, Political Aims Must Be Defined,” *National Defense Magazine*, March 30, 2017, <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/archive/2009/December/Pages/BeforeWarStrategyIsSettled,PoliticalAimsMustBeDefined.aspx>.

⁷⁶ Gregory Fontenot et al., *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press), 86.

⁷⁷ Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 351.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 351.

4. Phase IV: Post-Hostility Operations included “the establishment of a representative form of government in a country capable of defending its territorial borders and maintaining internal security, without any weapons of mass destruction.”⁸⁰

As is well documented by now, the initial success of the U.S. strategy in Iraq was swifter and faster than even Franks anticipated. Unfortunately, success during the first three weeks of combat operations through partial completion of Phase III was followed by an uphill eight-year-long fight, never truly culminating in Phase IV.

Since OIF has been so well studied, in the remainder of this chapter we will simply highlight significant breakdowns in the strategy that we believe reveal errors in strategic thinking, ultimately degrading the potential for a positive outcome in Iraq. In an effort to make our assessments more digestible, we will examine problems observed before the invasion (ineffective planning, flawed assumptions, the absence of a consensus government-in-waiting), and then problems that arose or continued after the invasion (failure to police, the Coalition Provisional Authority’s disastrous decision-making, mishandling of the insurgency).

1. Problems before the Invasion

One of Operation Iraqi Freedom’s main failures that manifested itself almost immediately was ineffective planning for Phase IV. While there may not have been an absence of planning altogether, it is evident that there was no shared vision concerning the execution of operations in a post-Saddam Iraq. Incredibly, even after the initiation of combat operations, there was confusion over exactly which element among the ground forces executing the invasion would be responsible for Phase IV. According to one RAND study, “The lateness of this decision suggests the degree to which senior civilian and military leaders within DOD underestimated the challenges that would confront coalition military forces after the defeat of Iraqi forces.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid., 351.

⁸¹ Bensahel, Nora, Olga Olikier, Keith Crane, Richard R. Brennan, Jr., Heather S. Gregg, Thomas Sullivan, and Andrew Rathmell, *After Saddam: Prewar Planning and the Occupation of Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Arroyo Center, 2008), 14.

After the execution of a CENTCOM wargame in December 2002, the CJCS ordered the creation of an organization that would serve as the “nucleus around which Phase IV operations would be planned and conducted.”⁸² In January 2003, Task Force IV (TFIV) was stood up with the intent of filling this role. However, by mid-February the new Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) Commander, General McKiernan, ordered Task Force IV’s dissolution. McKiernan ordered that one of his subordinate commands, V Corps, take the lead on Phase IV planning instead.⁸³ This decision was problematic for a number of reasons:

First, it [V Corps’ Phase IV plan] was completed at the end of April 2003, after the fall of Baghdad and after subsequent looting destroyed much of the infrastructure left intact by the military campaign and expanded the range of reconstruction requirements. Second, it lacked any additional resources; the forces and capabilities that had conducted major combat operations were the ones that would be available for postwar stability and reconstruction operations. Finally, the plan envisaged military forces supporting civilian reconstruction efforts, not playing the lead role. Yet ... civilian reconstruction efforts suffered from unchallenged assumptions, a very short planning time, and a lack of coordination with the military.⁸⁴

As the passage above indicates, planning on the civilian side was not going well either. The Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) (led by retired Lieutenant General Jay Garner) was not created until January 2003, leaving it only a few months to organize an effective Phase IV plan. Or, as Doug Borer and Stephen Twing put it, “ORHA was formally mandated to pull all of the existing stove-piped plans and ... given the arguably impossible task of putting together an integrated phase four plan with less than eight weeks to go before the war started.”⁸⁵

Shortly after ORHA’s creation, members of its staff drafted a 20-page document that detailed significant flaws with the then-current strategy for Phase IV, specifically: “We risk letting much of the country descend into civil unrest and chaos whose

⁸² Ibid., 11.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁵ Borer and Twing, “Blundering into Baghdad,” 506.

magnitude may defeat our national strategy of a stable new Iraq.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, information that challenged major assumptions held by senior policy makers, particularly Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld, ended up being dismissed or was insufficiently analyzed, preventing adjustments to the strategy prior to the invasion.⁸⁷ One RAND study highlights five serious unchallenged assumptions, four of which led to increased complacency regarding Phase IV planning: 1) “The military campaign would have a decisive end and would produce a stable security environment;” 2) “U.S. and coalition forces would be greeted as liberators;” 3) “Government ministries would continue to function;” 4) “Infrastructure throughout the country would remain largely intact.”⁸⁸ Meanwhile, even had these gaps in the strategy been identified by ORHA, Garner was notified that he would be relieved and the organization was disbanded only days after his arrival in Baghdad on April 24, 2003. Thus, alerting him to the gaps would have been pointless.

Yet another major obstacle standing in the way of any positive political outcome was the absence of a consensus government-in-waiting prior to the invasion. There was much debate over the make-up of the interim Iraqi government. Members of DOD, specifically within the Office of Special Plans, wanted a government comprised of exiles because they could be emplaced quickly and would prevent Baathists from participating in the new government. The “[Department of] State and the CIA argued that an interim [Iraqi] government composed of externals would have no domestic legitimacy.”⁸⁹ Sadly, the United States would combine the worst of both courses of action by waiting until June 2004, *sixteen months after invading*, before installing a government composed entirely of exiles.⁹⁰ This delay itself created immense problems since the lack of an identified Iraqi leadership made it extremely difficult for the United States to achieve

⁸⁶ Ibid., 507.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 507.

⁸⁸ Bensahel et al., *After Saddam*, 234–235.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 27.

policy objectives with regard to establishing a *representative* government.⁹¹ Tommy Franks himself notes that as the debate continued, “**America drew closer to war**. Iraq’s new leadership **would have to be identified on the fly**, even as the military liberation was under way. **Perhaps** an Iraqi general would step forward, or a figure from the educated elite.”⁹² Frank’s description is especially troubling because it reveals that he believed the war to be virtually inevitable, and that senior decision makers were going to execute it *regardless of whether the appropriate conditions were set or not*.

2. Problems after the Invasion

As mentioned in the RAND quote cited earlier, the military’s failure to stop the looting which ensued after Saddam’s fall had a catastrophic impact on remaining infrastructure and severely set back reconstruction efforts that would be necessary moving forward. However, perhaps worse, was what this did to the population’s view of coalition forces; it delegitimized them and undermined their authority. As Daniel Byman explains, “The psychological blow was perhaps the most massive. Iraqis believed that Americans would quickly restore the country to prosperity. The looting discredited the occupying authority and its Iraqi Allies, making them more an object of ridicule than of fear.”⁹³

No matter how flawed the strategy was up to this point, many observers would contend that worse was yet to come under ORHA’s replacement, the CPA. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Iraq, the head of the CPA and the President’s envoy, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, made two monumental decisions. The first was de-Baathification, and the second was the dissolution of the Iraqi Armed Forces. As many expected him to do, Bremer ordered the removal of “senior party members.” But, then, in

⁹¹ See also: Donald K. Reed and Matthew P. Upperman, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Selecting and Vetting Indigenous Leaders” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2013); Edward Mason, “DOD’s Use of Iraqi Exiles” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006).

⁹² Franks, *American Soldier*, 422., emphasis ours. To be clear, this is the equivalent of a strategic “Leeroy Jenkins” as seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hooKVstzbz0>.

⁹³ Daniel Byman, “An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle: Policy Failure or Bridge Too Far?” *Security Studies* 17, no. 4 (December 2008): 626, doi:10.1080/09636410802507974.

addition he dismissed “anyone holding a position in the top three management layers of any ministry, government-run corporation, university, or hospital.” In other words, anyone “who was a party member—even of junior rank—would be deemed to be a senior Baathist and so would be fired.”⁹⁴ This decision gutted almost every entity within the Iraqi government. Worse, it further complicated the already difficult reconstruction efforts, as many of the Iraqi professionals who were needed to carry out Phase IV tasks were Baath party members.⁹⁵ Finally, the de-Baathification order, having been issued by a coalition authority and not by a provisional Iraqi authority, lent credence to the view that the United States was an occupier and not a liberator, particularly in the eyes of Sunnis who had held many of these government positions.

The dissolution of the Iraqi armed forces would have equally negative physical and psychological consequences. In the physical realm, this decision directly affected approximately 400,000 Iraqis, which not only made it nearly impossible to provide local security as the order sent Iraqi army and police units home, but put hundreds of thousands of armed, trained, and angry men on the streets of Iraq.⁹⁶ Adding still more fuel to the fire was the psychological effect as the “the army was considered a national symbol and was widely respected ... perhaps most important, retaining the army would have sent Sunnis a message that in one key institution their influence would remain considerable.”⁹⁷

No doubt these actions placed the United States firmly in the crosshairs of many Iraqis; in fact, the ensuing insurgency should have come as no surprise. While the COIN campaign(s) in Iraq could (and should) be the subject of numerous other theses, some flaws in the U.S. approach need to be mentioned here. For instance, David Galula’s *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, a foundational text for the COIN Field

⁹⁴ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 158–159.

⁹⁵ Byman, “An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle,” 626.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 625.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 626.

Manual, cites four laws that should govern a counter-insurgent approach. The first and third laws shed important light on the error of U.S. ways in Iraq.

According to Galula's first law, "The support of the population is as necessary for the counter-insurgent as for the insurgent."⁹⁸ The insurgent relies on the population for a number of essential undertakings, ranging from masking his force to enable him to hide amongst the populace, to reconstituting his forces following losses in battle via recruitment. Without the support of the population, the insurgency is doomed to die on the vine. But the same is true, according to Galula, for the counter-insurgent. Yet, no matter how simple in concept, the contest over support of the population can prove extremely difficult in execution, especially in conflicts where the counter-insurgent is to blame for generating grievances that did not previously exist (i.e., devastated infrastructure). Winning the population's support is further complicated when the insurgency has ample time to establish firm control thanks to the absence of a comprehensive COIN effort. Not coincidentally, these describe the conditions in Iraq.

Meanwhile, Galula's third law reminds counter-insurgents that "support from the population is conditional."⁹⁹ In other words, in an area where the population is under enemy control, conditions must be established by the COIN force that will allow for the liberation of the population. According to Galula:

The minority hostile to the insurgent will not and cannot emerge as long as the threat has not been lifted to a reasonable extent. Furthermore, even after the threat has been lifted, the emerging counter-insurgent supporters will not be able to rally the bulk of the population so long as the population is not convinced that the counter-insurgent has the will, the means, and the ability to win.¹⁰⁰

The significance of meeting these conditions cannot be overstated. Even if members of the population agree that the counter-insurgent's cause is valid and righteous, if they do not believe that the COIN force can provide lasting protection, or they fear that the COIN

⁹⁸ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 52.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 54–55.

force will eventually lose or prematurely leave, they will side with the enemy. They will do so because, in their eyes, this is the only way to enhance their chances of survival. Sadly, U.S. actions in Iraq did too little to secure support from the populace, especially when this support was conditional upon improved conditions and enhanced security.

Finally, we would point out that the employment of conventional forces against an irregular adversary was bound to lead to a protracted engagement, in violation of Galula's laws, and also in defiance of Arreguín-Toft's opposite-approach theory (as described in the Introduction). Once large numbers of ground troops proved ineffective at denying insurgents freedom of maneuver (which transpired in Iraq), this led to an environment which proved target rich for the insurgents who, by carefully selecting targets of opportunity, demonstrated their strength to the contested population and, worse, delegitimized the credibility of the COIN force. Worse yet, the United States' inability to improve conditions on the ground did nothing to maintain or bolster public support at home, and may have helped lead to a premature exit.¹⁰¹

We must stress that we do not believe a better COIN approach integrated into the overall strategy for Iraq would have necessarily produced a win for the United States in Iraq. Even the best strategy is pointless in the face of failed policy objectives. Here, what we want to stress is that the ways and means implemented within the strategy (such as it was) were not conducive to achieving the articulated ends, as proven by the final outcome.

¹⁰¹ This is why (in our view) the majority of the COIN force should be provided by the indigenous state advised by a cadre of special operations forces who are specifically trained, organized, and equipped to conduct such a mission. SOF are oriented to helping build a long term security apparatus, ultimately enhancing the probability of the COIN force gaining support from the indigenous, contested population. Of note, we are not suggesting that conventional forces are an inappropriate tool for a traditional invasion, as they should be the first choice for maneuver warfare against an adversary's or any state's military. However, we do believe that conventional forces are a largely inappropriate choice for COIN. Moreover, history has demonstrated that conventional troops (strong actor) utilizing a direct approach against an unconventional enemy (weak actor) utilizing an indirect approach are generally unsuccessful unless the strong actor is willing to employ barbarism to defeat its weaker foe. As such, when Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated a swing towards insurgency, Special Operations Forces should have been assigned the COIN role. For more information on this, see Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict."

D. STRATEGIC COOPERATION

During the run up to Iraq, an absence of strategic cooperation most certainly made the pursuit of U.S. policy aims more difficult, hamstringing the ways and means that would be pursued. Moreover, infighting and marginalization of key principals, (most notably the Secretary of State and to a lesser degree the National Security Advisor) seemed to hurt the administration's ability to assess the appropriateness of the invasion and, worse, whether or not success was even possible. An unwillingness to cooperate at the highest levels of government certainly seemed to mire the United States in the trap that Samuel Huntington predicted will cause a nation to "squander their resources and run uncalculated risk."¹⁰²

Also, although "a powerful alliance of top leaders, led by Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, that shared the basic viewpoint that the major combat phase of the war would be the only real challenge, and that post war Iraq would take care of itself," the few dissenters had little sway.¹⁰³ Tellingly, some observers attribute Cheney's and Rumsfeld's unwillingness to consider that serious problems might arise in Phase IV to their fear that detailed planning for post-combat operations could potentially serve as an "impediment" for going to war in the first place.¹⁰⁴

Conflicting opinions and individuals who held them have been described as having been sidelined, regardless of their military or political experience. Most notably, Secretary of State Powell was not able to leverage his prior experience as he was "continually bypassed" by the president and excluded from "private meetings with Cheney and, increasingly, Rumsfeld."¹⁰⁵ Powell and the State Department, at one point or another, specifically disagreed with decisions related to: an Iraqi interim government

¹⁰² Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 1.

¹⁰³ Borer and Twing, "Blundering into Baghdad," 499.

¹⁰⁴ Byman, "An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle," 636.

¹⁰⁵ LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," 82.

“composed solely of exiles;”¹⁰⁶ evidence indicating that Iraq had WMD;¹⁰⁷ the concept that Iraq could be transformed by the U.S. into a flourishing democracy;¹⁰⁸ and the idea that Iraq was connected to terrorist organizations responsible for the September 11th attacks.¹⁰⁹ Powell even went so far as to state that diplomacy had to be exhausted and international support gained prior to the use of military force.¹¹⁰ Powell was not in any fundamental way opposed to war. Rather, he clearly understood that without clear objectives, or logical ways to achieve them, the utility of war is greatly diminished.

The last nail in the coffin regarding Phase IV planning was the dismissal of the State Department’s Future of Iraq Project.

Even though the Future of Iraq project was the most comprehensive effort within the U.S. government to examine the challenges and requirements of Iraq after Saddam, its insights and suggestions were not used as a basis for postwar planning efforts within the interagency process ... Internal bureaucratic challenges and external suspicion about State’s true motives, therefore, combined to marginalize State’s influence on the postwar planning process, as well as to limit the dissemination of ideas and information ...¹¹¹

As we described in the Introduction, the responsibility of the Assistant to the President for National Security (ANSA) is to ensure that the President is briefed on a full range of policy options in order to guarantee that there is sufficient debate and analysis about those options. However, as the passage above indicates, alternative views, or even dissenting opinions were not to be considered under the Cheney/Rumsfeld duopoly, which greatly minimized Condoleezza Rice’s ability to assert control over the

¹⁰⁶ Bensahel et al., *After Saddam*, 27.

¹⁰⁷ LaFeber, “The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine,” 85.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 86. Additionally, at a dinner conversation with Bush in August 2002, Powell warned the President: “An attack on Iraq, the secretary of state warned, could dangerously destabilize the Middle East, including such good allies as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It would also divert attention and resources from the real enemy: al Qaeda terrorists who remained safe and hidden along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border.”

¹¹⁰ Bensahel et al., *After Saddam*, 30.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

democratic process that should have governed the National Security Council. Or, as Borer and Twing explain:

There were dysfunctional power asymmetries among the principals, a failure to assure a balanced flow of information and advice to the president, and a lack of opportunities for wide ranging and honest assessment of a set of overly optimistic assumptions about postconflict Iraq.¹¹²

The fact that the National Security Advisor had to resort to sending spies into the Pentagon in order to obtain information concerning war plans was a sure sign that the system had arguably failed.¹¹³

In short, thanks to senior policy and decision makers being intentionally marginalized or kept out of the policy decision-making process, gaps arose in the Bush administration's approach to war. As obvious as it may seem that our nation's highest leaders should be bound to at least consider the full range of potential complications that might arise from any use of force, they did not in this case. Likewise, they rendered certain key departments of our government irrelevant during foreign policy and war planning. By violating these basic rules, strategic cooperation became impossible.

E. LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is dynamic in that it can exist at varying levels or amounts over the course of a conflict. For instance, what once appeared to be a "just" cause for going to war can later be determined to have been a false premise. If so, what then happens, especially after the damage has been done? In this section, we briefly examine the United States case for establishing *jus ad bello*, and discuss how legitimacy and public support for the war in Iraq dwindled as initial conditions for going to war increasingly appeared to be false.

¹¹² Borer and Twing, "Blundering into Baghdad," 505.

¹¹³ Zachary Shore, *Blunder: Why Smart People Make Bad Decisions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 208.

Critics might well argue that the invasion of Iraq is a case of good salesmanship combined with idealistic goals and intense national anxiety over the threat of terrorism generating a higher level of public support for going to war than might have been realistically established had an argument for legitimacy and just war clearly been included in the discussion from the outset. Prior to the invasion, if one were to look at the list of criteria for embarking on a Just War—just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, announcement of that intention, last resort, proportionality, and a reasonable hope of success¹¹⁴—a strong case can be made that the United States had satisfied most of those conditions. To briefly recap some of the events leading up to the invasion, recall that in his February 5, 2003, address to the United Nations, Secretary of State Colin Powell who, in 1993 polled as the “most trusted man in America,”¹¹⁵ provided the United Nations (UN) with a thorough and convincing argument that Saddam Hussein had supported terrorism *and* was seeking nuclear weapons.¹¹⁶

While the United States never issued a declaration of war, the U.S. Congress did approve a joint resolution known as the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 which “Authorizes the President to use the U.S. armed forces to: (1) defend U.S. national security against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and (2) enforce all relevant Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq.”¹¹⁷ As for U.S. intentions, who could possibly argue that these were malicious at the time? The United States sought “to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam’s support of

¹¹⁴ Childress, “Just-War Theories,” 428.

¹¹⁵ Karen DeYoung, “Falling on His Sword,” *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/27/AR2006092700106.html>.

¹¹⁶ “Full Text of Colin Powell’s Speech: US secretary of state’s address to the United Nations security council,” *The Guardian.com*, February 5, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa>.; Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004). 291. It is important to note, as Woodward does in his book, that the Bush administration specifically chose to use Colin Powell to make its case for the Iraq war due to his high level of national credibility and reputation as a reluctant warrior. Throughout our research it appears that Powell did not truly believe in what he was selling; however, it seems that his loyalty to the office of the president drove him to make this case despite his better judgment.

¹¹⁷ “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002.” H.J.Res.114. 107th Cong. (October 16, 2002). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-joint-resolution/114>. According to the website listed in this footnote, the AUMF against Iraq of 2002 passed the U.S. House of Representatives on October 10, 2002 by a count of 296-133 and the U.S. Senate on October 11, 2002 by a count of 77-23. The bill was signed by President George W. Bush and became law on October 16, 2002.

terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people,” as President Bush said.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the argument about whether or not this invasion met the criteria of last resort was essentially rendered moot when Secretary Powell reminded the world that Iraq had “been found guilty of material breach of its obligations” to disarm its weapons of mass destruction, in more than 16 UN resolutions over a 12-year period.¹¹⁹ It was also well understood that Saddam was a destabilizing actor in the region due to his prior invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and invasion of Iran in 1980.¹²⁰ Surely, removing Saddam from power would free the people of Iraq and help to ease tensions in the region. Besides, it was argued, additional sanctions on Iraq would only harm the innocent and oppressed population.

Ultimately, the invasion of Iraq involved the United States in a war of choice—a preventative war to avert a future attack on America. The United States was making the case that the risk of inaction was greater than the risk of invading. U.S. planning efforts also had to satisfy the condition of proportionality in terms of weighing harm to civilians in Iraq, harm to the U.S. military, and the expected amount of disruption in the region. The U.S. military took great care during its planning of the invasion to try to select targets that would minimize civilian casualties.¹²¹ The Department of Defense pushed U.S. military leaders to deploy far fewer forces than they initially estimated would be needed to defeat the Iraqi Army and conduct stability operations.¹²² Even with all of these constraints, the U.S.-led coalition rose to the challenge and accomplished its mission of militarily defeating Saddam’s regime in a matter of weeks.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Cramer and Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* 1.

¹¹⁹ “Full Text of Colin Powell’s Speech.”

¹²⁰ “Iraq Invades Kuwait.” *History.com*. Aug 02, 1990. <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/iraq-invades-kuwait>.; Roger Hardy, “The Iran-Iraq War: 25 Years on,” *BBC News*, September 22, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4260420.stm.

¹²¹ Bensahel et al., *After Saddam*, 74.

¹²² Ricks, *Fiasco*, 96–100.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 135, 145.

Unfortunately, the effort to establish the legitimacy of U.S. operations in Iraq quickly unraveled after the invasion and, consequently, public support for the U.S. war effort began to wane. Iraq did not have nuclear weapons and was never proven to be a state-sponsor of terrorism. Furthermore, freeing the Iraqi people might “brief well,” but amounted to an incomplete policy and failed to meet both the just cause and right intention criteria for *jus ad bellum*. To fulfill the right intention criterion as an aggressor in war, you must have fully thought out what you plan to do and have a detailed plan for how to improve conditions of peace post-conflict. The United States did not do this. For example:

The evidence shows that: (1) Military planning was thorough, demonstrating that other planning at the same level was possible. (2) After the invasion, it became clear that detailed U.S. government plans to manage Iraq after conquering it simply did not exist. (3) There was a lack of informed, positive planning to take care of the economic needs of Iraqi citizens. (4) There was no realistic plan for creating a stable, unified government among Iraq’s sharply disparate social, ethnic, and religious groups, simply a statement that the United States would do so. (5) There was no plan to deal with the virtual certainty of an eventual insurrection by at least some sectors of Iraqi society. In sum, the evidence shows a lack of the right intention necessary for a just war.¹²⁴

Meanwhile, “Proportionality of ends calls...for a painstaking, realistic calculation of the damage likely to be caused in the entire course of a war.”¹²⁵ Incomplete and unclear policy objectives and incompetent planning made this criterion very hard to satisfy, too. For instance, on the issue of projected troop levels prior to the invasion, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz claimed that:

¹²⁴ Craig M. White, *Iraq: The Moral Reckoning: Applying Just War Theory to the 2003 War Decision* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 139.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

some of the higher-end predictions that we have been hearing recently, such as the notion that it will take several hundred thousand U.S. troops to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq, are wildly off the mark.” He said it was “hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself...”¹²⁶

Tragically, it was Mr. Wolfowitz’s assertion that ended up being “wildly off the mark,” as U.S. troop levels in Iraq eventually surpassed 170,000 in October of 2007 during “the surge.”¹²⁷ As is clear now, nearly a decade and a half later, the conditions that the U.S. public was led to believe justified the case for a just war may have turned out to be false. Saddam, who was certainly a brutal and terrible dictator, did not possess nuclear weapons or effectively sponsor terrorism.¹²⁸

According to *jus ad bellum* criteria, what then happens when the criteria used to establish legitimacy for going to war are proven false? Once the conditions under which the war was justified are proven false, the war becomes illegitimate. Yet, once the United States had toppled Saddam’s regime, it had little choice but to stay and try to establish some sort of governance since it had toppled the government. In doing so, the United States found itself being re-taught the lesson that “changes of regime must be the work of the men and women who live under the regime—who also bear the costs of the change

¹²⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 167.; To be clear, we do not believe that sending more troops to Iraq would have made a difference in terms of the long-term stability of the country. Deploying more troops could not possibly have overridden the decision to dissolve Iraq’s political and security infrastructure. In conventional maneuver warfare, overwhelming the enemy with more troops makes sense. In a war turned asymmetric through failures of your own design, more troops can have little positive effect and may likely work counter to a successful outcome. During the surge in 2007 and 2008, the impact of sending more troops to Iraq was reflected in the sharp decrease in public support for the war as the U.S. public saw an expanding war effort with very little observable success.

¹²⁸ We do not want to be misleading by suggesting that there may not have been ulterior motives that drove the U.S. to invade Iraq. We also fully appreciate the fact that it may be necessary at times to keep hidden the tangential reasons for going to war. What we do want to suggest, however, is that when the U.S. government decides to craft a narrative for the nation and the world about its war aim, it must always consider whether or not that crafted narrative is, in fact, achievable.

and the risks of failure.”¹²⁹ Efforts at regime change by outside entities have rarely proven effective and are almost never legitimate without the support of the local population. This is one key reason why Operation Just Cause was deemed legitimate and Operation Iraqi Freedom was not.¹³⁰

F. CONCLUSION

“The failure in Iraq has a thousand fathers.”¹³¹ The lack of evidence of weapons of mass destruction, followed by the emergence of a violent insurgency certainly stoked the U.S. public’s frustration with the war in Iraq. Moreover, as described in this chapter, ineffective planning, flawed assumptions, the absence of a consensus government-in-waiting prior to the invasion, a failure to police, the CPA’s disastrous decision-making, and the mishandling of the insurgency that followed proved sufficient to prevent stability from being attained. Yet, while these failures contributed to the evaporation of public support, sadly they are but symptoms of a greater failure.

The greater failure was the inability to establish strategic cooperation at the highest levels within and among DOD, DOS, the NSC and the White House. That alone prevented the United States government from establishing realistic and achievable policy objectives for the war. This failure in both cooperation and policy making was bound to

¹²⁹ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), xviii.

¹³⁰ Some readers may notice that within the legitimacy section of the Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty case study we examined both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* and that here within the Operation Iraqi Freedom case study we have limited ourselves to *jus ad bellum*. We have chosen to do this for two reasons. First, to effectively examine *jus in bello* we would need to write multiple dissertations; we would need to more closely examine the strategy—more so than we already have in this case study—and how that strategy shifted over time. Further, we would need to address the impacts of events such as prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib, civilian casualties, Iraqi elections, the Awakening, the Surge, and so on. Suffice it to say that there are too many factors to include in one subsection of a thesis. However, while all of the events listed above are important in terms of how America tried to salvage its foray into Iraq, we believe that they are also irrelevant. If the premises for going to war can be proven false, then the effort lacks legitimacy and any strategy to maintain *jus in bello*, no matter how well-intended, becomes irrelevant because one cannot maintain legitimacy that was never properly established.

¹³¹ Byman, “An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle,” 601.

handicap any strategy produced by the military. After all, as already noted, “The role of the armed forces is to put forth the military strategy that supports political objectives. Poorly stated political objectives will result in a military strategy that is vague and perhaps even unachievable.”¹³² More than any other shortcoming, the inability of critical elements of the U.S. government to work together to develop a coherent and competent policy for Iraq yielded an insufficient strategy, set conditions for a decline in legitimacy, and led to the inevitable loss of U.S. public support.

¹³² Farrell, “Before War Strategy Is Settled, Political Aims Must Be Defined.”

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IV. COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION

A. INTRODUCTION

The outcome of any war is often in doubt while the war is underway. The enemy always has a vote, and the fog and friction of war can alter the strategic trajectory of a conflict. At the end of the day, a failure in Iraq may have been unavoidable. Some might argue that the situation in Iraq was far more complex than anyone in Washington could have imagined and that the complex environment facilitated U.S. failures, ultimately leading to a loss of public support. However, even if correct, that should not excuse the flaws in our approach. If anything, uncertainty and/or a lack of understanding should have led to more exhaustive diplomacy, more careful analysis regarding our policy options, and construction of a strategy that would have reduced barriers to success in Phase IV.

Washington's approach to Iraq, when compared to how it handled Panama, is truly confusing. In Panama, the administration waited until diplomacy had been exhausted (even passing up the offer of a coup). Then it laid out detailed, achievable political aims and transmitted these to Panamanians and Americans, and to the world. Also, the strategy employed in Panama was crafted so as not to incite a guerrilla war in a country of only 4,000,000 people. In contrast, government agencies, to include the armed services, failed to sufficiently cooperate when it came to Iraq. The administration limited the range of policy options it would accept, produced vague political objectives, and employed a strategy that all but guaranteed the development of an insurgency in a Middle Eastern country with nearly 26,000,000 citizens.

The intent in this thesis has not been to suggest that the United States was guaranteed a victory in Iraq. Certainly, other problems may have arisen absent the blunders already described. What we are arguing instead is that these blunders certainly did not help achieve any of Washington's desired strategic outcomes. Moreover, we would submit that had decision-makers in Panama made decisions similar to those observed in Iraq, the conflict, and thus the utility yielded through victory, would have

been significantly different. Indeed, there is every reason to think that the United States *could have* been mired in a protracted insurgency which, in turn, would have had regional repercussions. Consequently, it is worth reviewing what helped prevent Panama from becoming an Iraq, and where Iraq missed being able to be a Panama.

B. RECAP OF FACTOR COMPARISON

1. Policy

The two case studies we selected enabled us to examine how our four different but inter-related factors impacted Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty in Panama and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Some of the differences were subtle and some were sharp. For example, in Panama, policy objectives were to: 1) protect American lives; 2) restore the democratic process; 3) preserve the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties; and 4) apprehend Manuel Noriega.¹³³ These objectives were consistently echoed by each key actor in the U.S. government. Moreover, the clarity and consistency of these policy aims over time allowed strategists to focus all of their actions on definitive and achievable goals. As a result, most Americans knew what the United States was doing and could tell when the military had accomplished its mission. Conversely, in Iraq our stated objectives were “to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam’s support of terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people.”¹³⁴ The slight difference between *restoring* democracy versus freeing a country may not sound significant to the average American, but it actually is. The former implies that a nation is already familiar with a democratic process and wishes to return to it. The latter assumes that, upon achieving freedom, a great light will shine down and people will know what to do with it: namely, embrace democracy as conceived by the liberators. To attempt to achieve the first is to pursue the *status quo ante*;¹³⁵ to do the second is to start from ground zero.

¹³³ “Announcement of U.S. Invasion of Panama.”

¹³⁴ Cramer and Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* 1.

¹³⁵ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, xvii.

2. Strategy

A strategy must describe more than a general path leading towards some hazy objective. An effective strategy must be created by intimately understanding the desired political ends in addition to having a rational concept by which to achieve those ends via fitting ways and means. Or, to rephrase this, strategists must do more than articulate the objectives they want to see at the end of each phase of war: they must in fact implement actions that will work towards achieving those objectives, without further complicating them.

As a reminder, in Panama the U.S. strategy was stated as follows:

Phase I: Combat operations at the onset were designed to neutralize and fix in place the PDF, capture Noriega, install a new government, and protect and defend U.S. citizens and key facilities.¹³⁶

Phase II: Stability operations to ensure law and order and begin the transition to support a newly installed government.¹³⁷

Phase III: Nation-building that supported the new Endara government to include restructuring and training the new government.¹³⁸

U.S. actions served to greatly facilitate the goals articulated within the strategy for Panama by:

1. Placing in power the Endara government that was fairly elected by the Panamanian people;
2. Preserving physical infrastructure through restraint in targeting during the invasion;
3. Assisting in reconstruction efforts by providing security and policing after the completion of combat operations;
4. Re-deploying combat troops and creating a structure that placed the U.S. Military Support Group in an actual supporting role to the newly formed Panamanian government and Panamanian initiatives; and
5. Greatly reducing the risk of an insurgency by integrating the PDF back into the security apparatus.

¹³⁶ Flanagan, *Battle for Panama*, 40.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Now, recall the Iraq strategy. It was designed as follows:

Phase I: Preparation included “establishing an ‘air bridge’ to transport forces into the region and securing ‘regional and international support for operations.’”¹³⁹

Phase II: Shaping the Battlespace “[to] target Iraq’s suspected WMD sites, Republican Guards formations, and command and control facilities, and prevent their use of Theater Ballistic Missiles.”¹⁴⁰

Phase III: Decisive Operations included “‘regime forces defeated or capitulated,’ and ‘regime leaders dead, apprehended, or marginalized.’”¹⁴¹

Phase IV: Post-Hostility Operations included “the establishment of a representative form of government in a country capable of defending its territorial borders and maintaining internal security, without any weapons of mass destruction.”¹⁴²

In Iraq, U.S. actions served to greatly inhibit the goals articulated in this strategy, by:

1. Failing to recognize the immensity of Phase IV obstacles;
2. Failing to identify or build a consensus government prior to the invasion;
3. Allowing looting to destroy much of the remaining physical infrastructure which necessitated expanded reconstruction requirements after combat operations;
4. Prematurely replacing ORHA with the CPA which presided over Iraq as the interim government, largely disregarding Iraqi political initiatives;
5. Dissolving the Iraqi security and political apparatus which greatly enhanced the probability of an insurgency (or, at a minimum, created a grievance that could be directly blamed on the United States); and
6. Mishandling the insurgency by refusing to identify it as such and then employing a COIN effort extremely late, with misaligned conventional maneuver forces against an unconventional enemy.

In summary, in Panama the United States’ actions worked *toward* achieving objectives set by strategy with the ultimate goal of achieving policy aims. In Iraq, they did not.

¹³⁹ Franks, *American Soldier*, 351.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 351.

3. Strategic Cooperation

While reviewing the political goals to be achieved by Operation Just Cause, we consistently found the same goals listed across all manner of documents used and generated at the time. In these documents, the political goals were also generally described in nearly the exact same language. While searching for the same for Operation Iraqi Freedom, an operation that we both participated in and remember vividly, we could not find a consistent set of goals, listed the same way, using the same verbiage, no matter how many speeches we read by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, or Secretary Powell. In fact, we initially planned to use a list of eight objectives that a Department of Defense spokeswoman described in a April 24, 2003, press conference. They were as follows: 1) “eliminate the regime of Saddam Hussein;” 2) “capture, kill, or drive out terrorists and terrorist organizations sheltering in Iraq;” 3) “collect intelligence on terrorist networks;” 4) “collect intelligence on weapons of mass destruction;” 5) “oversee their [WMD] destruction;” 6) “secure Iraqi oil fields;” 7) “end the UN sanctions against Iraq and begin sending humanitarian aid to the country;” and 8) “help the Iraqi people establish a representative government that does not threaten its neighbors.”¹⁴³ However, among other problems, some of these were tactical-level objectives, some were normal intelligence objectives not worthy of going to war, some were just plain false, and some were diplomatic objectives. Nor did we see this list reproduced anywhere else.

The more we dug, the more glaring the absence of a unified and clear message became. This appeared to result from a lack of strategic cooperation among our nation’s leaders. According to our research and many accounts, Rumsfeld and Cheney effectively blocked the President’s chief advisors on foreign policy and national security policy, one

¹⁴³ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 128.

of whom (Colin Powell) also happened to be the only one to have ever served in uniform—and they blocked him quite purposely.¹⁴⁴

Here we do not mean to simply criticize Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld’s leadership styles. Rather, we want to drive home the lessons we learned regarding the immense importance of strategic cooperation: when our nation’s leaders are willing to work with one another, we have the prospect of wartime success. However, when they are incapable or unwilling to do so, we can expect blunders.

What also makes the cases of Panama and Iraq so valuable for comparison is how many of the same people served in leadership roles for both conflicts. Key leaders who participated in the planning for both endeavors are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. U.S. Key Leader Comparison

	OPN Just Cause / Promote Liberty	OPN Iraqi Freedom
President	George H. W. Bush	George W. Bush
Vice President	Dan Quayle	Dick Cheney
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (ANSA)	Brent Scowcroft	Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of Defense	Dick Cheney	Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of State	James Baker	Colin Powell
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS)	Colin Powell (after serving as ANSA under Reagan)	Gen Richard Myers
Misc. Senior Position:	Under Secretary of Defense for Policy: Paul Wolfowitz	Deputy SECDEF: Paul Wolfowitz
Misc. Senior Position	Dep SECDEF, then Director, CIA: Bob Gates	Replaces Rumsfeld as SECDEF: Bob Gates
Misc. Senior Position	ANSA: Brent Scowcroft	President’s Intel Advisory Board: Brent Scowcroft

¹⁴⁴ Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to the Honorable Condoleezza Rice, “Chain of Command,” December 2, 2002, The Rumsfeld Archive, <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/242/To%20Condoleezza%20Rice%20re%20Chain%20of%20Command%2012-02-2002.pdf>.; In addition to blocking Secretary Powell, Rumsfeld also had a difficult time working with the ANSA, as demonstrated in a declassified memorandum from December 2, 2002, titled “Chain of Command,” from Secretary Rumsfeld to the Honorable Condoleezza Rice in which he states “You and the NSC staff need to understand that you are not in the chain of command. Since you cannot seem to accept that fact, my only choices are to go to the President and ask him to tell you to stop or to tell anyone in DoD not to respond to you or the NSC staff.”

During Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty our military and political leaders in the George H. W. Bush administration demonstrated a shared understanding of the strategic environment in Panama and how the United States should proceed to achieve its war aims. We do not believe that the United States was successful simply because Panama was weak, or because it was an *easy* war. Instead, we believe that our easy road to victory was facilitated by a correct approach to the conflict—a correct approach that would not have been possible without intimate cooperation among our nation’s leaders.

Yet again, in Operation Iraqi Freedom an extremely similar group of decision makers pursued a very different approach to war. We do not believe they did so because these individuals no longer had the capacity to think or lead effectively. Rather, it appears they lost sight of the significance of collaboration. The lack of cooperation at the strategic level was likely the single most important factor behind the failures in Iraq beginning with ineffective policy-making and ending with the loss of perceived legitimacy and a failure to maintain public support for the war. What seems tragically ironic in retrospect is that had the administration not marginalized Powell, “the Reluctant Warrior,” but had it heeded his counsel to adhere to the tenets of the Weinberger Doctrine, the United States might have avoided what Thomas Ricks, among others, has dubbed a “fiasco.”¹⁴⁵

Granted, there are significant underlying differences between Panama, a country that the United States helped literally and figuratively to construct, and Iraq. But these just underscore our broader point: with less familiarity with Iraq, should not Washington have taken *greater* care? Should it not have proceeded more carefully?¹⁴⁶ Should it not have ensured that the necessary elements and agencies of government would have

¹⁴⁵ Ricks, *Fiasco*.; See Appendix for information on the Weinberger Doctrine.

¹⁴⁶ Donald Rumsfeld to the U.S. Secretary of State, “The Swamp,” November 23, 1983, The Rumsfeld Archive, <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/24/11-23-1983.%20Information%20Memorandum%20From%20Rumsfeld%20to%20The%20Secretary.%20The%20Swamp.pdf>.; Oddly enough, in the memorandum referenced here, Donald Rumsfeld writes to the U.S. Secretary of State in 1983, after concluding a trip around the Middle East, that “In the future, we should never use U.S. troops as a ‘peacekeeping force.’ We are too big a target. (Let the Fijians or New Zealanders do it); and...[keep] reminding ourselves that it is easier to get into something than it is to get out of it.” Naturally, this begs the question: How did the same person who made these astute observations in 1983, decide to completely ignore them and pursue aims in the opposite direction 20 years later?

strategically cooperated to achieve realistic political objectives? Yet, when one examines the cases side by side, as seen in Table 2, the Panama case throws into high relief just how prone to failure our endeavor in Iraq was, despite the tremendous efforts expended by the military.

Table 2. Decisions and their Impacts in Panama versus Iraq

	Panama	Iraq
Grasp of Operational Environment	Intimate knowledge of infrastructure and day to day life of both enemy and populace	Lack of intimate knowledge of infrastructure and day to day life of both enemy and populace
Policy	Clear, achievable political objectives	Vague, un-achievable political objectives
Strategy	Elected government identified/reconstituted and in concurrence with U.S. objectives <i>prior</i> to invasion	No consensus government identified prior to U.S. invasion
	Physical infrastructure preserved through restraint during invasion; conditions set for reconstruction after combat operations via provision of security and policing	Looting allowed to destroy much of the remaining physical infrastructure that had been preserved through restraint during the invasion; expanded reconstruction efforts were required after combat operations
	Combat troops re-deployed after security conditions were set; the Military Support Group subordinated to Panamanian government in support of Panamanian political initiatives	Flow of combat troops was stopped prior to security being established; CPA prematurely replaced ORHA and largely disregarded Iraqi political initiatives
	PDF was re-integrated into the security apparatus, greatly reducing the likelihood of an insurgency	Disbandment of the Iraqi security and political apparatuses increased the likelihood of an insurgency
	Prevention of insurgency ensured 'same-approach' strategic interactions: direct vs. direct	Creation of insurgency facilitated 'opposite-approach' strategic interactions: direct vs. indirect
Strategic Cooperation	Strategic cooperation allowed for the creation of a shared vision regarding policy aims and a strategy whereby they could be achieved	Lack of strategic cooperation prevented the consideration of alternative policy aims or coherent adjustments
Legitimacy & Public Support	Thanks to decisions listed above, perceived legitimacy was enhanced, ultimately maintaining public support for the conflict	Thanks to decisions listed above, perceived legitimacy was degraded, ultimately leading to a loss of public support for the conflict

4. Legitimacy

As discussed previously, legitimacy is the bridge that connects policy, strategy and strategic cooperation to public support for the use of force. Legitimacy must be established prior to going to war in order to gain the required initial support for the use of force. Then, legitimacy must be protected and maintained throughout the war in order to sustain public support for the war effort.

Legitimacy in Panama was established via clear political objectives and was maintained by a strategy that, once quickly executed, saw the military return home swiftly. U.S. administration officials seemingly spoke with one voice when describing U.S. political objectives to the American people. Furthermore, U.S. strategists, given clear objectives, devised a plan that re-instated a legitimately elected leader while taking measures to prevent an insurgency from arising. They did so by limiting damage to infrastructure and by not removing everyone working in the Panamanian government. These actions ensured that the United States maintained legitimacy throughout the conflict.

Legitimacy for going to war in Iraq was perceived to have been established prior to the invasion, but was lost when holes in U.S. policy were revealed and the United States failed to adapt once the well-published premise for going to war (e.g., WMD) was proven to be false.

Again, with so many similarities in the lead-up to regime replacement, how did the two outcomes differ so greatly? For one, in contrast to Panama, the U.S. political objectives in Iraq, specifically “to free the Iraqi people”¹⁴⁷ were poorly defined and therefore unachievable. While this should have been addressed prior to the invasion, the impact of this failure on the legitimacy of the war was not felt until after the Iraqi people were allegedly “free.”

Even more importantly, the decision to go to war in Iraq also illustrates what can happen when sufficient public support for a conflict appears to temporarily relieve senior

¹⁴⁷ Cramer and Thrall, *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* 1.

U.S. leaders of the responsibility to ensure the legitimacy of the conflict.¹⁴⁸ After the United States failed to appropriately adapt to the fact that two of the three conditions the administration had used to justify the war were proven false, legitimacy was bound to diminish: Iraq did not have nuclear weapons and was not supporting terrorists. The capstone, however, was the fact that the United States had removed Saddam Hussein from power without a legitimate replacement *and* had implemented a policy and strategy of de-Baathification that essentially guaranteed that an insurgency would develop. The result is that public support fell back to a level more commensurate with revised perceptions of the legitimacy for the conflict: minimal at best.

C. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

While conducting research for our two case studies, we found it extremely difficult to isolate any single factor in order to explain how that factor either assisted or hindered U.S. efforts. We discovered that this is a function of the extent to which these factors are inter-dependent. While any one of the factors, for instance, strategy, can be used to paint a picture that details what an appropriate strategy should consist of, an appropriate strategy, even though necessary, still is not sufficient for gaining and maintaining public support. Figure 1 is our effort to graphically depict the manner in which the factors interact throughout a conflict.

¹⁴⁸ Frank Newport, "Seventy-Two Percent of Americans Support War Against Iraq," *Gallup.com*, March 24, 2003, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/8038/SeventyTwo-Percent-Americans-Support-War-Against-Iraq.aspx>.

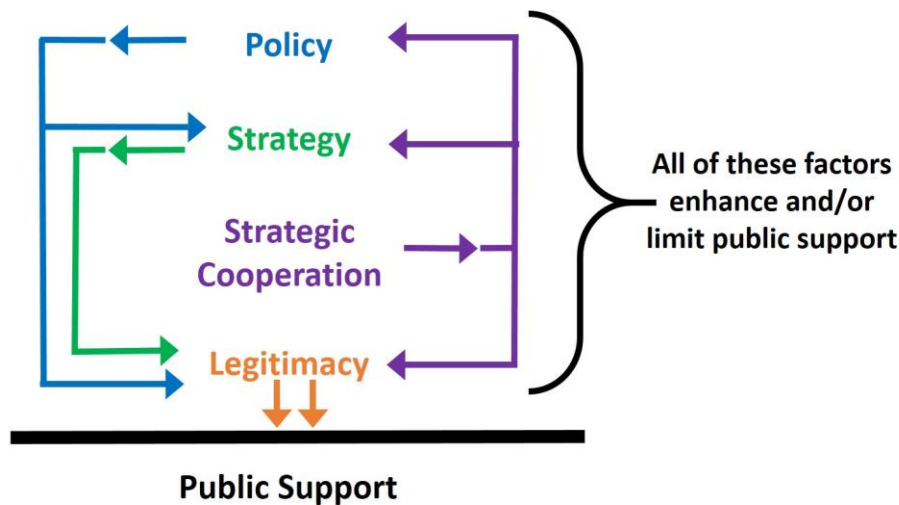


Figure 1. Interaction of Factors Affecting Public Support for Conflict

While policy is the basis for effective strategy and for establishing the *jus ad bellum* portion of legitimacy, strategy is key to maintaining the *jus in bello* element of legitimacy. Strategic cooperation is the notion that all elements responsible for United States foreign policy, to include the defense and intelligence communities, must work together to help develop policy that can be turned into strategy as well as strategy that is both appropriate and achievable. This is how legitimacy is maintained.

Legitimacy is the bridge that connects our first three factors—policy, strategy, and strategic cooperation—to our ultimate goal: public support for the use of force. Policy, strategy, and strategic cooperation form the base of an argument for legitimacy. Levels of legitimacy are generally reflected via the degrees of public support for the use of force. So, how does one gain and maintain legitimacy, and in whose eyes does legitimacy most matter? Beginning with the latter question, there are generally three critical audiences: the domestic U.S. population, the population in the target country, and the international community at large. Legitimacy in the eyes of the international community ensures that the United States adheres to international norms and treaties, which can help garner additional support for war efforts or coalition building. Legitimacy in the eyes of the target country’s population is essential for avoiding resistance or an insurgency, particularly if the United States is executing regime change and/or plans to

nation-build after major combat operations. Last, and most importantly, legitimacy in the eyes of the American public is crucial if an administration hopes to establish and maintain public support.

Public support is a byproduct of the relationships just described. In order to establish and maintain public support, the United States should not focus on achieving it directly. Rather, public support can only be sustained if there is a clear, achievable policy, a sound strategy, and strategic cooperation throughout. Only this will ensure that our operations are legitimate. Why is public support so important? Because “If the external power’s ‘will’ to continue the struggle is destroyed, then its military capability—no matter how powerful—is totally irrelevant.”¹⁴⁹

Or, to restate this and return to our initial assertions, when the U.S. population moves from being supportive or complacent to actively withdrawing support from U.S. participation in conflict it has crossed the threshold. Once this is passed, the operation, military leaders, political leaders, and so on, are “on the clock.” A theoretical timer has started and U.S. senior leadership now has three options: 1) win quickly, 2) get out quickly, or 3) get back under the threshold and regain public support.

America possesses the most powerful military the world has ever seen. However, it appears that by neglecting to pay sufficient attention to the factors described in this thesis, Washington will continue to lose public support for military actions that do not meet the public’s expectations—expectations that our leaders set and must actively manage as conditions change. Not only does an inability to adapt or strategically cooperate imperil any strategy, but when the strategy and policy are flawed we can expect further losses—in legitimacy, conflicts, and lives.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 179, doi: 10.2307/2009880.

APPENDIX

The Weinberger Doctrine was created by Caspar Weinberger when he was Secretary of Defense for President Ronald Reagan. In it, he lists six conditions or tests that should be considered prior to committing U.S. forces to war. A summarized list is as follows:

1. The commitment must be deemed vital to our national interest or that of our allies.¹⁵⁰
2. It should be made "wholeheartedly, and with the clear intention of winning."¹⁵¹
3. Political and military objectives and the ways to meet them must be clearly defined.¹⁵²
4. As conditions change, whether the commitment remains in the national interest must be reassessed.¹⁵³
5. Before a commitment is made, there must be "some reasonable assurance" of popular and congressional support.¹⁵⁴
6. A commitment to arms must be a last resort.¹⁵⁵

Colin Powell eventually added a seventh element to the Weinberger doctrine, which was:

7. "before troops were committed to battle, U.S. officials must have worked out an 'exit strategy,' in a definite time frame, so the soldiers would not be expected to stay anywhere and fight indefinitely."¹⁵⁶

With the addition of this seventh condition, the complete list is now often referred to as the Powell Doctrine.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ "The Weinberger Doctrine," *The Washington Post*, November 30, 1984, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/11/30/the-weinberger-doctrine/c7f20ffe-b591-4189-ad05-a704aac1935d/?utm_term=.9d6dd8905cfe.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," 76.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 76.

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